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ABSTRACT

The role of the political class in the debate on how to improve education in the Sahelian countries is examined in this monograph. Although cultural backwardness and faulty inquiry impede educational quality, the major problem is the absence of political forms through which all people can participate in educational reform. A review of the evolution of school systems during the colonial period indicates that members of the political class defined educational needs that did not meet the needs of the people and suppressed opposing demands. The current push by elites for basic education, an extension of the colonial period logic, is combined with the erroneous belief that literacy and attendance equals productivity. This impaired analysis is often paired with religious doctrine. The following longterm solutions based on adherence to democratic practice are offered: (1) cultivate community schools; (2) create opportunities for those outside the political class to express and share ideas; (3) demand equal representation at all educational meetings; (4) focus on changing the characteristics of secondary schools and national examinations for inducing change at the primary level; and (5) do not reinforce the capacities of governments to continue to respond to increased demand for schools in the same manner as in the past. A conclusion is that democracy is a technique for improving the quality of analysis and the social process by which society judges analysis. A world map, 3 figures, and 2 tables are included. (Contains 36 references.) (LMI)

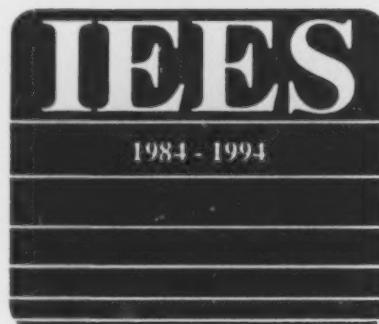
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The Political Economy of Education in the Sahel

October 1991



IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY
OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

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Florida State University
University of Texas at Dallas
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• OF •
EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS**

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October 1991

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It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new order, this lukewarmness arising partly from fear of their adversaries, who have the law in their favor; and partly from the incredulity of mankind, who do not truly believe in anything new until they have had actual experience of it.

He who desires or attempts ... reform ..., and wishes to have it accepted and capable of maintaining itself to the satisfaction of everybody, must at least retain the semblance of old forms; so that it may seem to the people that there has been no change ... even though in fact they are entirely different from the old ones. For the great majority of mankind are satisfied with appearances, as though they were realities, and are often even more influenced by the things that seem than by those that are."

The Prince, Niccolo Machiavelli [circa. 1520]

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I. INTRODUCTION and SUMMARY

The debate on methods to improve education, a social process that is a permanent feature of all societies, has become noisier in the Sahelian countries in recent times. Many individuals and institutions, for the most part foreign to Africa, have appeared on the scene with long lists of things wrong and things required to make them right. There seems much to be done.

A general theme that drives this process is the apparent mismatch between the current purposes and characteristics of education systems and the needs of the societies that they serve. Since schools and other forms of education simply reflect the social, economic, and political conditions that surround them, it follows that if education is to become more consistent with social needs, so must the factors that produce the conditions. In this study we look mainly at one of these factors: the ideas and activities of the individuals and institutions that engage themselves in the debate. They are an important element of a small but influential social category that we call the political class to distinguish between people who can and cannot influence the decisions of government.

Our conclusion is that the ideas and activities seem to be doing more to impede than to help education to become more attuned to social needs. On the eve of the 21st century, too many advocates of change insist on adopting perspectives and methods of reasoning that are more characteristic of the 18th and 19th than of the 20th century. Defective analyses of important issues compound the counterproductive effects of this cultural backwardness. However, the central challenge to efforts to improve education in the Sahel is not backwardness or faulty inquiry. It is the absence of political forms through which people who are the intended beneficiaries of the improvements can at the same time become members of the political class and put pressure on others who are already in it to change their ways. That is, the urgent matter is not about how to reform education. It is about how to bring democracy to the process of reform.

Our review of the evolution of school systems during the colonial period shows that there was only one instance, in 1946, when some people in the Francophone portions of the Sahel demanded and received an education system of their choosing: the French metropolitan system with its focus on attainment of secondary school certificates. Demand for other forms of education, such as Islamic instruction, was suppressed. What the people in the Sahel needed, according to the administrators, missionaries, and other members of the political class during the colonial period, was "practical" or "adapted" education that Africans inside and outside the political class found useless.

What the people need now, according to administrators and latter day missionaries in several donor agencies, is "basic education" or other kinds of knowledge that seem appropriate to everyone but the people. This reasoning about need is an extension of the logic of the colonial period and an extension of the elitist logic that permeated discussions of popular or primary education in Europe in the past. This logic presumes that questions about what is or is not basic or appropriate, or why it is or is not these things, cannot be answered by people who do not have the needed knowledge. People can never need what they want. They can only need what self-proclaimed experts and other authorities define as basic or appropriate.

One difficulty here is that the basis that the authorities in the political class use to define what is or is not basic, or what is or is not important in other areas of education, is usually personal conviction that borders on religious doctrine. For example, there is a blind faith that literacy and attendance at school are inherently good no matter the characteristics of the social and economic circumstances in which people live. For many authorities, this faith flows from the notion that literacy and attendance at school enhance productivity.

The evidence suggests that this concept has managed to sustain itself mostly on a foundation of impaired analysis. The notion has only little "rational" or "scientific" backing. It follows that literacy rates, enrollment rates, and levels of school attainment may not be pertinent indicators of the quality of "human resources"; that the benefits to be derived from sending more boys and girls to school may often be low; and that decisions of parents regarding whether to send children to school may be more rational and scientific than the decision of authorities to insist that parents should do so.

There is also no evidence to sustain the implicit assumption that schools offer pertinent education, or the assumption that this education necessarily requires schools. Depending on their circumstances, the education already provided by parents and communities may be more basic, more appropriate, and more useful for productivity than anything the schools offer now or can offer in the future. When literacy and schools have nothing to do with productivity, and when they do not even offer education, it becomes difficult to make sense of many proposals to improve the quality of what takes place in the schools, or to improve the financial aspects of school systems. Many of these proposals are also expressions of individual or institutional faith and religious doctrine.

But the main difficulty is not the soundness or coherence of ideas and suggestions. There are times and places where all may make sense. Indeed, they are neither better nor worse than other ideas that people outside the political class might propose. The problem is that these other ideas have no greater means to insert themselves into the consciousness and debates of the political class than they did

during the colonial period. There is no challenge to the premises of cultural backwardness. There is no challenge to ideas that rest on defective analysis. That is, the individuals and institutions of the political class that concern themselves with education do not hear what other people have to say because they do not need to hear them to survive.

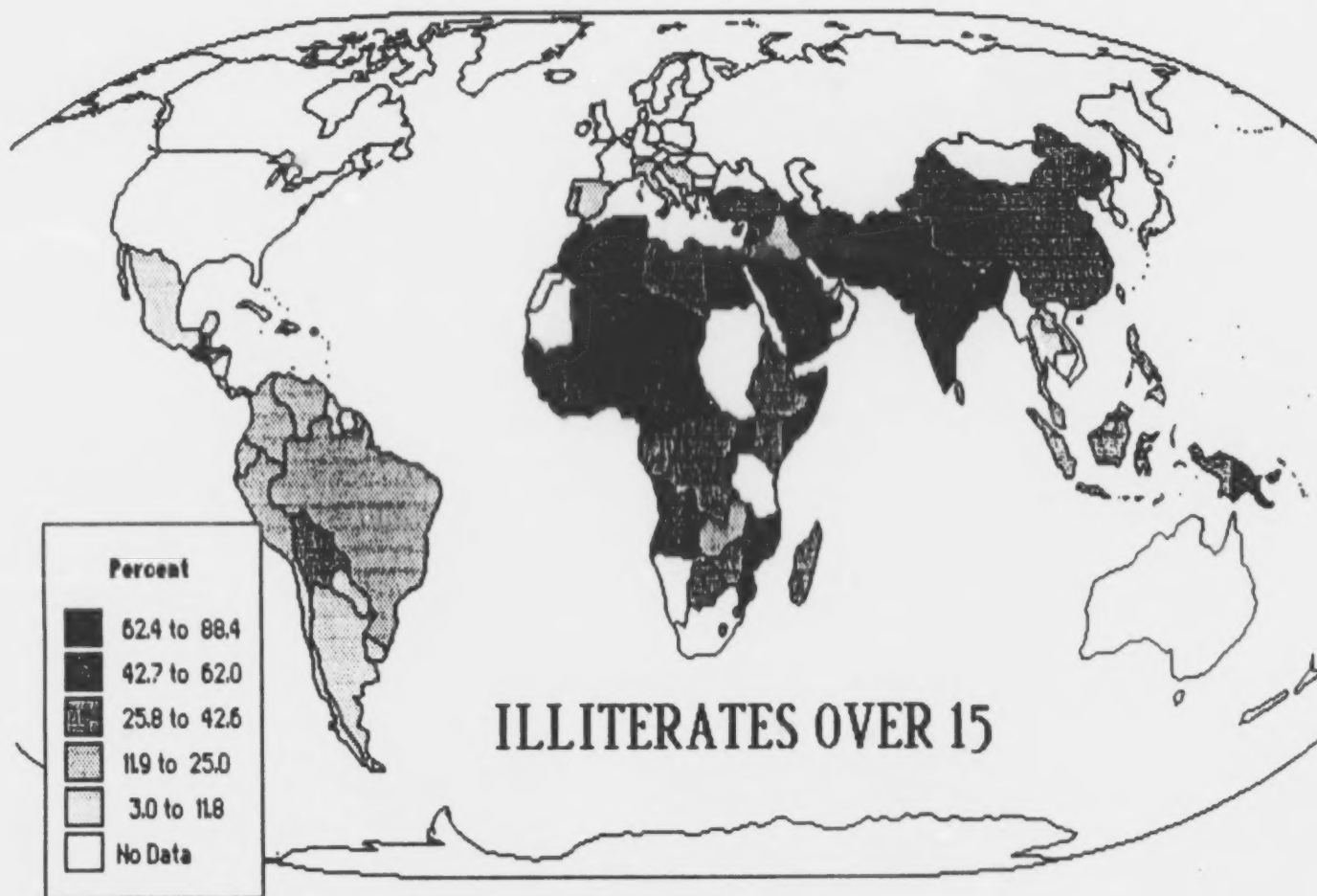
Elimination of this problem will take a long time. Fortunately, history suggests that a new kind of missionary work, one that tries to counteract the current styles of work with an approach that organizes itself around blind faith in democratic practice, may be helpful. Articles of this faith, as well some steps to preach it, are:

- literacy rates, levels of school attainment, enrollment rates or other measures of the quality and quantity of human resources do not necessarily have the same significance in all parts of the Sahel as they do in the industrial nations;
- increases in these rates and levels cannot usually cause increases in productivity and economic growth by themselves;
- government schools and education are not necessarily one and the same thing;
- to the extent that the demand for primary schools may derive mainly from a desire for certificates from higher levels, focus attention on changing the characteristics of secondary schools and national examinations for inducing change at the primary level;
- at the primary level, focus energies only on activities that seem to offer good prospects for both improving learning outcomes and meeting least resistance from parents, students, teachers and administrators (e.g., in-service teacher training and procurement of books);
- do not reinforce the capacities of governments to continue to respond to growth in the demand for schools in the same manner as in the past;
- use the opportunity presented by the confluence of fiscal constraints and increases in demand to cultivate the emergence of community schools because these offer promise as instruments for engendering: renegotiations of the social contract between governments and civil society; decentralization; and democratization of the processes by which education systems evolve.

- cultivate opportunities for people outside the political class to express opinions and to argue among themselves and with members of the class about: their definitions of basic education; their ideas about how to improve it; their judgements about the most appropriate methods to transmit it; their approaches to implementing and financing it; their senses of whether these approaches include roles for government and donor agencies; and their conceptions of how these and other institutions of the political class can best participate in the life of their communities;
- use the Segou round table of 1989 as a model for beginning to provide such opportunities; and
- demand that all future large and small meetings about education include representation from the full spectrum of people who have vital interests in the matter because, in the interests of promoting democracy, this kind of approach must become as habitual in the future as the culturally backward one is today.

We do not suggest these things only because we believe in democracy. This is certainly a factor. But we also note that the debate about education is taking place almost exclusively within a limited circle of people in government and in donor agencies who have little conception of the circumstances in which most people live, and who are ignorant of the types of education that are already in place in these circumstances. Excluded from the circle are all those who are to benefit in some way from the conclusions of the debate, who understand their circumstances, and who supply their own education. The debate therefore lacks the involvement of the people who are expert at assessing, carrying out, benefitting from, and paying for education. On strictly technical grounds, therefore, their expertise has a place in the debates.

When new ideas are carried out without the benefit of prior expert review, they usually fail. The trail of failures in the industrial nations, not to mention in the Sahel, bear ample witness to this basic lesson of history. No matter what else it may be, democracy is also a technique for improving the quality of analysis and the quality of the social process by which society judges analysis.



II. COLONIAL EDUCATION ¹

The first French school came to the Sahel when the governor of Senegal invited a teacher to open a primary facility for boys near Dakar in 1816. Initial languages of instruction were French and Wolof. The school abandoned the local language in 1829 because of disinterest by parents and students. A few years later the sisters of the Congregation of St. Joseph de Cluny organized a school for teachers, and a school for girls that emphasized household and sewing skills. The Brothers of Ploermel followed in 1840. They eventually took charge of large portion of primary instruction in Senegal. They also started a training program in agriculture, woodwork and metalwork. Low enrollment caused them to cancel it.

In the second half of 19th century the colonial administration established secular schools to attract Muslim students, including evening classes to serve those who attended Koranic schools (i.e., primary Islamic schools) during the day. It also established "hostage schools," which later became "schools for sons of chiefs." This was the first deliberate effort to prepare people for service in the administration. Customary chiefs were obliged to send their sons to this school. Many of them supplied slaves rather than sons. Still, when the occupational mobility of graduates through the ranks of the administration became evident, so did the advantage of sending sons -- if not to the chiefs then to others.

There were approximately 900 primary students in Dakar in 1860, including 200 girls. A secondary school opened in the city in 1884. Four primary schools opened in Mali in 1882. Military officers and local translators were the teachers. A school for sons of chiefs and a vocational facility followed close behind. Then the Fathers of the Holy Spirit established two agricultural schools and other congregations set up primary facilities in Segou and Timbouctou. In 1900 Mali had 800 students in 30 schools. Missionaries provided instruction in most of these establishments by that time.

Enactment of the Laic Laws that prohibited Catholic congregations from teaching in government schools temporarily halted the process of expansion in 1903-4. These laws were the result of the latest battle in a 120-year struggle between the Catholic church and Republican governments for control of the purposes to be

¹ This review of colonial education draws largely from Capelle (1990). Except for occasional references to Tchad, in French Equatorial Africa, it covers only French West Africa, i.e. the area that today contains Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauritania and Benin. The review does not cover the British and Portuguese periods in the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde.

served by French schools, i.e., to produce good Catholics loyal to the Church or to produce good citizens loyal to the Republic/State.

Application of these laws in Africa caused many schools to close for lack of lay teachers to replace the missionaries. Enrollment rates for girls suffered greatly. When the Catholic sisters who had developed the trust and confidence of Muslim communities left their posts, parents withdrew their daughters from school. The estimated enrollment rate for girls in French West Africa dropped from 17% in 1903 to 5% in 1917.² Benin was an exception. Many communities found means to pay the missionaries and to finance the schools after the administration withdrew support. This effort, an indication of high community interest, may partly explain why enrollment rates for boys and girls in Benin were and remain among the highest in the region.

Coinciding with the transfer of teaching authority from missionaries to the state, the entire school system narrowed itself to a single purpose: production of skilled personnel for the administration and for other components of the colonial economy. Clozel, governor at the time, made this clear when he said:

I think that the most important outcome to obtain from the instruction that we provide in our colonies should be one of usefulness, first for us, then for our natives (translated from Désalmand, 1983).

The administration reorganized the system for this purpose in 1903. This involved creation of a hierarchy of filters with increasing specialization at each level. At the bottom was the village school. It provided four years of basic instruction in the rudiments of language, literacy and numbers, and some training in agricultural work. Next was the regional facility. It offered the same four years of basic instruction as the village school for students that lived in its immediate vicinity. Because the quality of instruction was better than at the village level, it also received the most promising students from villages in boarding facilities. In addition, it offered two years of middle-primary instruction for graduates of the four-year cycle.

There was also an urban school. The only difference between this and the regional facility was that it replaced agriculture with training in metalwork, woodwork, dressmaking and other household crafts. Students that graduated from the middle-primary level at the regional and urban levels could go to a vocational

² These and all other enrollment figures in this report should be interpreted with caution. The administrators, no more than now, did not know the exact size and rate of growth of the population. The figures are useful only as indicators of the general direction of absolute enrollment.

school or to two more years of advanced primary study (ecole primaire superieure - EPS). Graduates of the EPS could then move on to either a normal school that offered three years of training for careers as teachers or as administrative assistants, or to a medical center for training that led to service as health assistants.

The Laic Laws were relaxed in 1913. Missionaries resumed their teaching activities, particularly in village schools. Although they could establish non-government village schools and teach religion in local languages, the missionaries had to follow the official curriculum and teach it in French. In addition, the administration began to support Koranic schools and took over three Medersas (secondary Islamic schools) that trained teachers (marabouts) for the Koranic schools.

One reason it did this was to bring more Muslims into the school system and eventually into the administration. The vast majority of people was Muslim. They were under-represented in the hierarchy of schools because parents, to the extent that they had any interest in helping an occupying power to meet its goals, were generally more hostile to the idea of secular school than Christians and animists. Since the administration could not bring enough Muslims into the hierarchy, it expanded the system to include the Islamic schools. Another reason, perhaps more important, was to bring Islamic teachers under its direct control. The spread of ideas associated with pan-Islamic nationalism, ideas that challenged the authority of the French, had to be blocked.

There were also two lycees in Senegal catering almost exclusively to children of French citizens. They were not part of the colonial hierarchy of schools. They followed the curriculum of the metropole and their diplomas gave access to further education in France. The diplomas granted by the African schools lacked standing in France and did not offer access to further secondary or higher education.

The estimated enrollment rate in West Africa stood at 2.4% in 1938-39, with about half the students in non-government schools. This low level of enrollment was deliberate. There was no reason for colonial schools to produce more graduates than could find gainful employment. Even so, in some areas it was very difficult to find parents who were willing to sacrifice their children to meet the needs of the French. In these areas the administration expanded its usual obligation, i.e., that chiefs collect taxes and recruit forced labor from their subjects, to include supply of a minimum quota of students for each school.

The disinterest in schools was only partly the result of the enduring hostility of many Muslim (and other) parents toward the French. It also resulted from the irrelevance of the curriculum. In the view of the parents, though it was "practical" for the French, the curriculum was completely "academic." It contained nothing

that could possibly prove of use in the probable life courses of the young -- not even literacy. Also, the system as a whole offered no possibilities for other life courses, such as opportunities for advancement to secondary and higher levels. Then there were the gardens and workshops. Besides the fact that this instruction was either useless or inferior to what the children learned at home, the obligation of students to work the fields or to make wood and metal items was the same as forced labor. It was worse when school masters behaved more like planters or businessmen than like teachers. It was slavery. Africa had had enough of that.

Naturally enough, enrollments declined dramatically in Mali and Guinea when the French stopped the practice of involuntary education in 1946. The decline eventually reversed itself, however, in step with reform of the educational system to make it identical with the one in France. This was the first and last reform of substance to take place in the region.

The reform resulted from the confluence of two political currents. One was incessant demand by indigenous employees of the French for an education system that would give Africans greater access to the highest levels of the administration and other colonial enterprises. French citizens with metropolitan diplomas monopolized these posts, with a handful of Africans who had managed to obtain them through the local lycees or in France. Clearly, more Africans needed these diplomas. The unity of African interest in this issue showed itself at a 1944 conference in Brazzaville. Participants agreed on a resolution calling for (French) "education for the majority."

When African representatives to the French parliament expressed this demand they received counter-proposals for practical, adapted curricula. These proposals made no sense to most or all the Africans. Each one was a recapitulation of the very education system that they were trying to eliminate. Like parents who refused to send children to school, they also saw that what looked like "practical" and "adapted" to their French colleagues in parliament was almost totally academic in Africa.

The second political current was the French government's decision to move toward assimilation of its colonies to slow the process of decolonization, which was regaining momentum toward the end of European war. This resulted in promotion of the colonies to the status of overseas territories of France. It also resulted in parliament's decision to accede to the demands of the African representatives in 1946.

This reform removed agricultural work from rural schools. It combined European and African children into the same classrooms. And it tried to make the primary curriculum more consistent with the milieu by introducing new texts that covered local history, geography and nature. It also made the curricula of urban and rural

primary schools identical. This allowed equal access to secondary and higher levels of instruction. With respect to these levels, the reform opened colleges (4 years) and lycees (7 years) to Africans in all territories. The University of Bordeaux supervised the examinations and diplomas were valid in France. The administration also provided scholarships for study in France because there were no facilities for higher education until the University of Dakar opened its doors in 1950.

The impact of the reform on the enrollment rate was almost instantaneous. In West Africa, where a quarter of students were in non-government schools, the rate reached 4.2% in 1950. This was much lower than in adjoining areas. In French Equatorial Africa, with half the students in non-government schools, the rate was 8.5%. In Togo and Cameroun, where 43% and 78% of students were in non-government schools, the rates were 23% and 20%. Still, the rate for West Africa represented a 75% increase over the figure of a decade earlier.

The quality of many of these schools seemed poor. For example, Capelle (1990) reports that during a visit to a middle-primary class in the Ivory Coast in 1949, he noted the following question on the blackboard:

What is the amount of funds that, if invested at 4% for one year, yields 4,680 Francs in capital and interest combined?

The solution provided by the teacher, also written on the blackboard, was:

*100 F in 360 days: $(4 \times 360) / 12 = 120 F$
which thus become: $100 + 120 = 220 F$
the amount is thus: $(100 \times 4,680) / 220 = 2,127 F$*

This was not a unique case. Quality looked like a widespread problem even when the enrollment rate was only 4%. But this approach to interpreting quality was not germane to the colonial education system before 1946, or to the French one.

Ever since Napoleon restructured the education system to meet the needs of his administration, the attention of French governments focussed on secondary schools (Lewis, 1985; Ulrich, 1967). The purpose of primary education, besides imparting literacy to those who might want it, was to supply the secondary schools with survivors, i.e., "people of quality" who passed the national examinations no matter what took place in their primary schools. The demand by the government and the economy for labor with secondary certificates was usually less than the quantity that these schools could produce if too many primary graduates entered them.

Until the struggle for equal access to secondary education began to make progress after 1960, a process that the French call "democratization" of education, there was no reason for the central government to be concerned with the quality of primary schools. Since the target of passing the examinations remained in place, parents, teachers, administrators, inspectors and local government leaders had every incentive to try to improve the schools in their communities.

By way of contrast, the approach to education was different in the United States. It was a society swept by wave after wave of immigrant populations containing many nationalities, religions, and languages. The challenge this presented to local school boards and state governments (i.e. not the central one that has a very limited role in education) became one of fostering order and unity of purpose. The "common" primary school emerged to meet this challenge during the 19th century (Castle, 1970; Commager, 1976).

For the boards and the governments, the purpose of this school was to assimilate the population by: teaching one language; using literacy to promote the ideas of tolerance and democracy; inculcating the notion of a common history and destiny (e.g. the "melting pot" society); and so on. The quality of primary instruction was therefore crucial. Secondary education, essentially an extension of the primary school, was less important. Its purpose was to reinforce the teachings of the primary school and to respond to the social and economic demands of the local community by introducing other general or technical courses as necessary.

In any event, the issue of quality did not seem germane to African parents who wanted to send their children to school. More important to them was the chance to provide their children with something that looked like a French education. Of course, this opening was meaningless if there were no opportunities to make practical use of literacy in French and recognized diplomas. Fortunately, these opportunities increased after 1946.

As the nations approached independence (most in 1960), Africans were rapidly replacing Europeans in the administration and in emerging industrial, agro-industrial and commercial enterprises. French and donor agency investments in various development activities were increasing the demand for goods and services. Many cities were growing rapidly in response to these economic forces. That is, there were now some very sensible reasons to enroll children and to encourage them to advance to the highest possible level. Proficiency in French and literacy were essential to employment in the expanding sectors. And the higher the level of school attainment, the higher and more remunerative the level at which individuals could enter employment. There was even the promise of going to France.

Accordingly, the enrollment rate soared to 15% in 1958. This was an increase of almost 400% over the figure of eight years earlier. There were also 22,000 students in secondary schools and 1,000 at the University of Dakar. Still, the rates varied greatly from one place to another. In major towns they were between 70% to 90%, except in Dakar (50%) where rapid population growth made it difficult to keep up with demand for school places. Rates were also 50% or higher in those rural areas of Senegal, Ivory Coast and Benin that were undergoing significant economic expansion. Unfortunately, this expansion was absent in most areas. Average figures for each country and across the region's landscape were therefore much lower: 34% in the Ivory Coast, 30% in Benin, 25% in Senegal, 12% in Guinea, 8% in Burkina Faso and Mali, 7% in Mauritania, and 4% in Niger.

The process was similar in Tchad. Enrollment grew from about 50 students in 1921 to 900 in 1939, 7,300 in 1950 and then to more than 40,000 in 1958. Rates varied here as well, from 3% to 36% in different areas of the country (Mbaïosso, 1990).

To some observers in 1958, such as Capelle (1990), it seemed that the governments of the newly-independent states would not find it possible to sustain these high rates of enrollment growth without new resources or more effective use of available resources. The governments were already devoting 20% to 25% of their national budgets to education. But the rates continued to rise for the next three decades. Following the irregular pattern of social, economic and political change, the rates also continued to vary significantly between countries and between regions within countries -- reflecting enduring differences of interest among parents in sending children to government schools.

One can speculate that the enrollment rates and interest in schools might have been higher and more uniform in 1958 if the French (and the British and Portuguese) had invested more in government schools during the colonial period. They also could have introduced European systems much earlier. They could have provided more scope to missionaries to establish non-government schools everywhere. They could have used the indigenous education systems already in place as foundations for building up systems of community schools. They could have given government, missionary and community teachers more authority and resources to design curricula and to organize schools around the social, economic and cultural characteristics of local communities. They could have done more to stimulate demand for literacy -- either by spreading the growth of agricultural production and trade from the coastal areas into the hinterlands or by supporting the interest that all Muslim parents share in having their children recite, read and live by the Koran. They even could have asked parents for their opinions about schools. But the European powers did not do these things. They lacked reason to do them.

One also can speculate that outcomes might have been different today if the Sahelian countries had emerged from the colonial era with forms of political organization that allowed a larger spectrum of different interests in education to exercise influence upon the actions of government. This might have made it possible for the societies to discover a large variety of answers to two reasonable questions: What purposes should schools serve in countries that have the particular historical, social, economic, cultural, linguistic, religious, and other characteristics of the Sahel? What kinds of school systems can promote these purposes most effectively?

The industrial societies often asked these kinds of questions. The struggle between the Catholic church and the Republicans in France was a battle between two of many answers. The common school in the United States was also an answer. Japan's search began with a mission to Europe and the United States. The emissaries were impressed with the French and the German systems. Japan adopted a combination of them in 1872. During the next three decades the system changed often in response to conflicts between different answers proposed by different interests in the society. The matter was settled in 1890. Then Japan began the process all over in 1945 (Kayashima, 1989).

The societies of the Sahel possessed many answers to the questions. However, because independence was by itself unable to alter the relationship between the governors and the governed that had been in effect since Europe first arrived in Africa, the societies emerged from the colonial era with no greater capacity than before to propel more than two answers into national debates and politics. The purpose of schools, following the tradition of Napoleon and the reform of 1946, was to prepare people for service to the "modern" (ex-colonial) administrative and economic apparatus or, following the missionary tradition, the purpose was to provide knowledge and skills to Africans that looked "practical" or "basic" mainly to the inhabitants of the industrial nations. We thus come to a third speculation: progress in education is unlikely to accelerate unless the characteristics of politics move toward promoting rather than obstructing the actions that we listed above.

III. POLITICS

Independence consisted primarily of a move by Africans, who were already participating in the colonial administration and "modern" parts of the economy, from lower to higher levels of the apparatus, and a concurrent move by Europeans from the higher levels to a new branch of the apparatus called the donor agency. The answers of these individuals, which were the same as the answers of their constituents in the Sahel and abroad that they served, moved with them but did not change. They did not change because, without expansion of their

constituencies to include people with other answers, there was no compelling need for change.

At least to some extent, the necessary expansion did not occur because the vast majority of the population that lived in rural areas and that possessed and practiced additional answers did not have reason to become constituents. Most of the oppressive aspects of colonial rule were gone by 1958. Independence was an interesting but largely irrelevant detail for most of them -- or at least no more interesting than the rotations of kings might have been to French farmers. Names changed but the relationship between rural people and the institutions of central governance remained the same. Most farmers and herdsmen did not care about monarchs, colonial authorities or independent governments. There was nothing of significance that distant people who claimed the privilege of calling themselves rulers could do for them. There was little to demand of these rulers other than the right to be left alone.

Since rural people made few demands of the apparatus, the apparatus could easily ignore them and concentrate on being responsive to the minority in urban areas at home and from abroad who were constituents precisely because they made demands. Accordingly, the debates and politics concerning the "reform" of education systems, i.e. between the two main answers to the question about purposes, have limited themselves to struggles among three groups of indigenous and foreign people that for simplicity we call members of the "political class".

The first group comprised staff and consultants attached to the education units of several donor agencies, particularly the United Nations and the World Bank, and by a variety of African and foreign education analysts, theoreticians, professions, experts and private organizations. They spilled into the region on the tide of development assistance that followed colonial assistance. Most of these individuals agreed with the idea that the purpose of secondary schools was to supply manpower for the state and for modern enterprises of the economy. However, they did not subscribe to the idea that entire education systems should be organized only for this purpose. The existing systems were costly investments in ignorance. They offered knowledge and skills that were useful only to the very small minority of students who reached upper-level secondary schools and the possibility of acquiring salaried employment.

The systems also should provide knowledge and skills that could improve the social and economic lives of the majority of the population. Members of this group therefore concerned themselves with broadening the scope of education systems to include this purpose, and with adjusting the characteristics of different parts of the systems to serve it. These adjustments involved efforts to make the content of curricula in primary schools and in other forms of instruction more appropriate to local conditions. They also involved efforts to make the management of the

systems more cost-effective and to increase the amount of resources available for investment in reaching the new goal.

The concern with content expressed itself in: "non-formal" education; "adult literacy" schemes; "adapted" curricula; "basic education"; and "ruralization" efforts. The concern with administration and finance aimed at: "cost-recovery" (i.e. shifting a larger share of total costs from government to parents and students); "prioritization" (i.e. shifting resources to the primary level from higher levels); and improvements in "internal efficiency" (i.e. shifting investment from items with less to items with greater impact on student and school performance, such as books and in-service training of teachers).

The second group in the political class contained most (urban) parents, students, teachers, administrators and a few agencies with special relations in the region such as the French government. Individuals in this group also believed that school systems should be of value to everyone and be pertinent to local circumstances. But the suggestions for altering purposes and characteristics that seemed appropriate for people in the first group were often inappropriate for people in the second one. Sometimes it was a matter of principle. Systems that were good enough for Europe were good enough for Africa. Change was possible, even welcome, but it had to take place in Europe as well. At other times ideas about goals, curriculum and finance seemed too reminiscent of the colonial era. Practical curricula were what missionaries and the colonial administration had tried and failed to carry out with success since 1816. Calls for parents to pay more than they already did were reminders of forced taxation and labor.

Most often the problem was that many ideas or the methods by which they were to be implemented did not make sense. Curricula that individuals in the first group viewed as suitable might be irrelevant in the social and economic circumstances of most of the Sahel (Diarra, 1991). Even if the curricula were inappropriate, the practical value of schools did not have much to do with acquisition of knowledge and skills. Practical had more to do with service as a screening device for prospective employers. Change of curricula was therefore not a problem as long as entire education systems changed simultaneously -- particularly the content of national examinations. Similarly, asking teachers and administrators to cover more students and thus do more work was fine. But the request was incoherent if there was no tangible reason for them to do it, such as higher remuneration. For want of reasonable suggestions, the individuals and institutions of the second group ignored most proposals for change from the first group.

The third group was a sub-component of the previous one. It comprised people in senior government positions with personal opinions about education that were little different from those held by others in the second group. It could not be

otherwise. The officials were the ultimate products of the existing systems. They had benefitted enormously from these systems both before and after 1946. They were living proof of the advantages to be gained from the systems. They were under no internal pressure to make major changes. They might sometimes take the risk of exercising leadership in certain matters if they felt strongly about them. However, like officials of governments everywhere, and of other social institutions such as donor agencies, they usually avoided risk. They were "followers" who concerned themselves primarily with their political solvency.

This solvency depended to a very considerable extent on their capacity to manage political patronage in an effective manner. It was therefore important to solicit and to accept resources and other benefits offered by donor agencies. Since the solvency of staff in several agencies also depended on their ability to pass grants and loans to the governments, it was not especially difficult to obtain the resources. More difficult was the challenge of finding ways to keep the important segments of one group happy without estranging the other.

Several methods were available for this. One technique was to make statements in international meetings that the first group appreciated while taking no or only limited initiative at home (e.g. "experimental" programs). Another technique was to sign accords for assistance and then afterward to allow the inertia of implementation that flowed from resistance to change to keep innovation within acceptable limits. Important among these accords were projects that provided salaries, per diems, equipment, international scholarships and training stipends, buildings, construction contracts, inexpensive books, teaching materials and other items of value. More important in recent times, but involving considerable risk because the political consequences were difficult to predict or control, were agreements that promised large additions to budgetary resources in exchange for major policy changes. No matter the method they used, the practical purpose of education was as clear to them as to leaders of the industrial nations. It had to serve the needs of politics and political solvency.

Of course, the notion that there were only three groups engaged in the politics of education is an over-simplification of what was and remains a complicated affair. Nevertheless, it helps to clarify some features of the politics during the last three decades. People in the first group thought that their suggestions for change were sensible. People in the second group viewed many of these suggestions as incomprehensible. Even if they dated from the time of Napoleon, the purpose and characteristics of the existing school systems were sound. People in the third group were less concerned with these opinions than in assuring that their actions maximized political effectiveness. Political costs had to be lower than political benefits. When decisions needed to be made between the noise of the foreigners and the noise of citizens, the choice was clear.

The passage of more than three decades since independence produced a large accumulation of suggestions to improve education. There were many attempts carry them out them. Certain attempts were somewhat successful in certain places. In general, the ideas had little impact upon the purposes and characteristics of schools. Other than numbers of students, teachers and facilities, the essential features are the same today as they were in 1958.

Many individuals in the first group who felt strongly about the need for change faulted lack of political will and politics for this outcome. This explanation was partly correct. Politics was involved. But politics cannot exist in a vacuum. It can exist only when there are differences of opinion and of interest about ideas. The politics of education could not impede change. It could only reflect the lack of consensus on the ideas themselves. That is, fault lay in the ideas and not in the politics that they created.

Missing in the flow of ideas during the last three decades, therefore, were suggestions that had the capacity to cultivate more agreement than disagreement. The reform of 1946 was testimony to the possibility of such ideas. The reform was also evidence that education systems could change rapidly and dramatically in response to them. The main factor that contributed to the success of this reform was the direct link between European education systems and actual possibilities for social and economic advancement in the expanding parts of the economy. The suggestions of missionaries, colonial administrators and members of the French parliament for practical or adapted curricula did not have this quality before 1946. The suggestions for practical or adapted curricula of latter day missionaries and administrators in the donor agencies and in other segments of the political class also do not have this quality.

Thus a major obstacle that has confronted the members of the political class is the difference in their "cultures", i.e. differences in perspective about the meanings and purposes of education that derive from differences in social and economic experiences. The goal of trying to offer education that could improve the social and economic lives of the majority of the population was fine. But the barrier of culture presented itself every time people in one or another of the groups already presumed to know the nature of the education in question and the method by which it could be transmitted. As in our notation about government officials, it was difficult for people who benefitted from or who were acquainted with one education system not to believe that "everyone" could and should benefit from a similar kind of system. There could not be situations where something so simple as literacy or a diploma might have no social or economic value. Certificates and literacy were inherently good. The question: Good for what? had no meaning. When people had faith in the answers that they already had, there was no need to seek new ones. This was unfortunate.

It was unfortunate because most parents outside the political class who taught their children directly had additional ideas about education, schools, purposes and characteristics. Very few in the political class thought it pertinent to solicit their suggestions and opinions because they already knew the answers and could therefore speak coherently for or against change for those outside the class, and because the people who were outside the class were by definition unable or uninterested in commenting on these claims.

This situation is not new or specific to the Sahel. It was present in the flow of educational politics in Europe, North America and Japan for hundreds of years. It is still present. Still, from time to time the cultural barrier lowered itself and opened the door to the discovery of additional answers. Because so little has changed during these last decades, it may be time for increased effort to lower the barrier in the Sahel. A useful place to focus this effort is the obstacle presented by the idea of "basic education".

IV. BASIC EDUCATION

People in every society believe that there is a minimum quantity and quality of knowledge and skill that every individual must acquire to be a good person and a good member of the general community. There is universal agreement that this basic education is very important. Differences of opinion arise only in connection with competing answers to a complicated question: What is basic, when, for whom, and why?

Historical studies indicate that the answers to this question are shaped by the particular social, economic and political characteristics of the environments in which people live. Since there are many environments, there many answers. These answers, at their essential level, manifest themselves in the education provided by parents and other members of the family to each new generation. At a next level is the education provided by specialized instructors who have expertise in certain subjects, and who happen to be available in the vicinity. Sometimes this instruction is an extension of home education. It covers material upon which parents attach social or economic value. They do not teach the material because they feel that they are less qualified to do so than the instructors, because it is more cost-effective in terms of their time to centralize certain training activities, or for other reasons.

In other cases the instructors offer material that parents do not value. This material serves the interests of the communities in which they live. Depending on the degree of social, economic, and political integration in a territory, families may live within only one small and self-contained circle such as a village, or within a

much larger circle of communities that circumscribes many villages, cities, ethnic groups, religions, languages, regions and nations. No matter the size of the circle, the material that serves the interests of the communities at any moment is defined by the characteristics of power and politics within the circle at that moment.

That is, there are at least two components to basic education. One component has knowledge and skills that individuals and families find useful for themselves. The other component has material that other families, who usually live in different social, economic and political circumstances, wish to offer or to impose upon them for various reasons. This is the component that causes most of the difficulties concerning the what, when, for whom, and why of basic education.

For individual families, the definition of what is or is not basic depends on the degree to which their environments offer opportunities and prospects for participation in valued economic or social activities. Literacy, for example, cannot be basic if it serves no practical social or economic purpose. It becomes basic when opportunities arise to make it useful. Historical studies suggest that the transformations that were most important in making literacy basic were the growth and spread of opportunities for participation in religious, commercial, and government activities (Castle, 1970).

In parts of northern Europe and of the United States in the 17th century, for example, the idea that faithful Christians should have access to God's word by reading the Bible guided many families and communities to recruit teachers and to establish schools. Most people had no other use for literacy at that time. Still, many literate people tended to believe that if it was good for themselves, it was good for everybody. To the extent that the first to become literate in most communities were also among the more wealthy and powerful elements in these communities, they could impose their beliefs on others. Faith in the value of the reading the Bible, for instance, guided many of these people to pressure the leaders of the colony of Massachusetts (United States) to impose compulsory instruction in 1647 (Ulrich, 1967).

As the growth of commerce and government spread through the industrial nations to offer increasing opportunities for using it, demand for literacy and for other forms of knowledge and skill accelerated. This worried some people among the elites that directed the activities of the government, especially when the main factor that stimulated demand for education was access to government employment. Colbert complained in 1667 that too many Latin schools in France were producing too many lawyers, petty judges, petty bureaucrats and shabby priests (Cippola, 1969). Similarly, De La Chatolais protested in 1762 that:

even the working people want to study...and after a poor education that teaches them only to despise their father's profession, they ... join the clerics; they take posts as officers of the law, they often become persons harmful to society. (cited in Cippola, 1969: 100).

Others among the powerful, especially after the French Revolution, worried less about whether literacy and other forms of knowledge constituted a threat to political stability. They concerned themselves more with capturing and harnessing literacy to strengthen the social order. This was the concern that lay at the heart of the battle between the Catholic church and Republican governments that we mentioned earlier, of the Japanese government, and of the state governments in the United States.

In this respect, basic education is a method for promoting the needs of those who happen to be in control of the community (i.e. state) apparatus. These include the need to: promote political socialization; build national identity in new nations containing diverse ethnic groupings; consolidate newly-acquired central power; maintain and reproduce particular patterns of social stratification; enhance the productivity of labor forces; encourage economic development; achieve social justice; protect the environment; and so on. So, every type of knowledge or skill always has an advocate somewhere because, as in Massachusetts, it is a matter of faith or, as in France and Japan, it serves a vital purpose for them.

A fundamental question regarding basic education in the Sahel, therefore, is: Do the ideas about this education among individuals and donor agencies in the first group of the political class respond more to the needs and interests of the population, or more to their own needs and interests? Mostly, the answer is that the ideas seem to have little or nothing to do with the needs and interests of most of the population. There are several factors that contribute to this state of affairs. One is that most actors in the first group are ignorant of the social and economic circumstances in which most people live, and of the indispensable education that these people provide for themselves in these circumstances.

Another factor is the cultural backwardness of too many actors. On the eve of the 21st century, they continue to guide themselves by methods of reasoning that are characteristic of the 18th and 19th centuries, and of the colonial era. The essence of this backwardness, a third factor, is their inability to understand the meaning of democratic social practice. Although they may disagree among themselves, they presume that they, and not the population, know what is or is not basic. Constrained by this cultural barrier, they do not ask questions or think to work in collaboration with people to discover ideas for new forms of basic education that might make sense in the Sahel. If this cultural barrier is not replaced with a culture that appreciates the meaning of democratic practice, it may take another

century or two for the societies of the Sahel to approach universal literacy. We explain.

a. Indispensable Education

The first and most influential instructors in all societies are parents. The education that they provide is a daily process through which they teach their young everything that they believe is important for children to learn. This covers a large inventory of behaviors and skills that have proven their worth through generations of repeated use and refinement. Items in this inventory with the highest priority are those that permit the young to be successful in helping their parents and others in the family throughout the life cycle, in starting and maintaining their households, and in becoming productive members of the wider community. This education is basic, practical and universal. Its duration, content, and organization may vary across different societies and time periods. The function remains the same. From one generation to the next throughout recorded history, it contributes to the survival and development of the individual, the family, and the society.

Mbaïosso (1990) reports that rural training programs for children in seven different ethnic groups in Tchad all begin at two and end at adulthood, or at 15 years of age. The sequence of subjects for boys, besides learning that occurs through experience and practice, covers: initiation to religion; morals and social conduct; use of farm and hunting implements; nature and the physical environment; production of traps; management of animals; crop production techniques; social convention and law; geography; history and culture (e.g. stories, legends, myths, etc.); participation in community affairs; verbal expression and debate; and intellectual refinement. The sequence for girls covers: morals; social conduct and politeness; initiation to household tasks; personal hygiene; posture and physical comportment; culture; pounding of grain; production of thread; sewing and knitting; preparation of meals; hairdressing, cosmetics and dress; sex; and understanding of aphrodisiacs.

Each social group pursues a different combination of courses according to its particular circumstances. They may include other items such as commerce, production of tools and utensils, digging of wells, management of community facilities and programs, reading, writing, counting, use of weights and measures, and various service activities. They also may adopt different methods of organizing the instruction. Parents sometimes work alone. At other times they delegate responsibility to older children, to members of the extended family, or to others in the community with special knowledge of certain subjects. These last are the community's recognized tutors and teachers. They can instruct one or many children simultaneously.

No matter how communities organize themselves to offer it, everything in the curriculum has tangible use and meaning in family and community life. It prepares people for careers as husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, spiritual guides, midwives, nutritionists, farmers, herdsman, hunters, traders, manufacturers, engineers, scribes, administrators, teachers, officials and citizens of the community. This is pure vocational training. It is the essence of basic education for the vast majority of people in the Sahel.

b. Cultural Backwardness

Participants at a 1976 meeting of African Ministers of Education in Senegal, sponsored by UNESCO, talked about basic education. For them, this education encompasses all activities that offer individuals the minimum level of knowledge that is indispensable in their societies and that these societies can provide at a given moment (Botti, et al, 1978; Belloncle, 1984). In addition, it has to: (a) be flexible and adaptable; (b) offer complete coverage of the minimum amount of knowledge; (c) be integrated with lifelong education processes; (d) be directly linked to community development; (e) promote the interests of the entire community; (f) have low cost; and (g) serve as a means to promote democratization and civic participation.

The concept was reaffirmed at a UNESCO seminar in Niger in 1989 (i.e. IIEP, 1989) and in the 1990 declaration of the "Education for All" conference in Thailand. The declaration stated that the goals of providing basic learning needs to all are to;

equip people with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they need to live in dignity, to continue learning, to improve their lives, and to contribute to the development of their communities and nations. (CMET, 1990)

Except for the matter of democratization, an item that people are unlikely to master if their communities are not imbued with democratic practices, the "new" idea of basic education or learning that came forward at the meetings is in form and substance the same as the old idea of indispensable education already in place since the beginning of history. But the participants of 1976, 1989 and 1990 did not talk about this old idea. The participants talked about another old idea, one that had to do with providing instruction that they considered important. Guizot, French Minister of Education in 1833, would have been comfortable in Thailand. In a circular to teachers he explained that a new basic education law designed to promote primary education for all had as its goal that people:

acquire if possible that knowledge which is indispensable for social life and without which the mind languishes...[but the law is designed] for the state as well, and in the public interest, since liberty is secure and routine only among a people who are enlightened enough to hear...the voice of reason. Universal primary education is thus one of the greatest guarantees of order and social stability. (cited in Maynes, 1985:55)

In another setting, Guizot elaborated on what he viewed as indispensable knowledge and the public interest:

through the teaching of reading and writing and arithmetic [the curriculum] provides for the most essential necessities of life; through teaching the legal system of weights and measures and of the French language it implants everywhere, enhances and extends the spirit and unity of the French nation; through moral and religious instruction it provides for another order of needs every bit as real... for the dignity of human life and the protection of the social order. (cited in Maynes, 1985:55)

Of course, both in 1833 and more recently, it is difficult for the advocates of basic education to agree upon its composition. As it has been for hundreds of years, almost everything is open to debate and to the struggle between their ideas about the purposes that education should serve. Individuals and institutions that follow the colonial tradition and preach the gospel of "development," for instance, recommend emphasis of health, nutrition, protection of the environment, technological change, civics, the role of women, principles of democracy and other related themes. For those who insist on "practical", there is always the suggestion of school gardens and workshops.

Other individuals and institutions, in the tradition of Guizot and most governments, press for subject matters that contribute to maintenance and reinforcement of social order and loyalty to the nation-state. They emphasize the need for promoting a common language, history, culture, geography, morals, and the like. Because the Sahelian countries are congregations of different peoples, languages and religions that have not yet fully acquired national identities, the emphasis also incorporates a (Euro-) African motif.

Unlike their predecessors of one hundred and fifty years earlier who understood that they were talking only about primary schools, proponents of the new basic education have also been unable to agree on methods of implementation. Some propose that it be done through change in the curricula and expansion of conventional primary schools. Others, rediscovering an item that was once called the village school, suggest the need to create and expand a new type of standardized facility called a "basic school" (or "fundamental" one) that precedes, co-exists with or replaces conventional schools. A third idea is to use non-school or

"non-formal" approaches that could benefit adolescents and adults as well as younger children. Yet others suggest the use of radio or television instruction in combination with one or more of the preceding formats.

Still, and as in 1833, there is widespread agreement on three things. One is that basic education must result in literacy no matter which methods and subjects are pursued. The second, expressed more in action than in word, is that the knowledge and skills provided by parents and community instructors is not education. By extension, the third is that the role of parents and communities with respect to the new basic education limits itself to acceptance or rejection of what is offered by governments, donor agencies, and non-governmental organizations. Parents can enlist their children or themselves in a program or they can ignore it. Nothing that they may decide to do for themselves can by any stretch of the imagination be considered either basic or education.

This is logical. Clearly, the vast majority of people in the Sahelian countries do not have the particular education that was discussed in Senegal, Niger or Thailand -- or by Guizot. Rates of illiteracy in the Sahelian countries make this obvious. To borrow the language of the Thailand conference, it thus follows that they do not have the minimum level of indispensable knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are required to learn, to improve their lives, or to contribute to the development of their communities and societies. At a meeting of the Club du Sahel in 1990, one individual who thought highly of the Thailand proceedings put the matter this way:

in the end, the participation of these populations [in development] is compromised by their lack of basic education. How can we seriously expect these villagers ... to take charge of their problems...if we must continue to deal with illiterates? How can we hope to extract youth from their current choices: to vegetate in the countryside or to inflate the floating and uprooted population in the cities, without an education...? ...It is regrettable that it has taken such a long time to recognize and to admit the need for this undeniable prerequisite called basic education. (translated from OECD, 1991: 85)

This logic is also old. The movement to expand primary schooling in France was called "popular education" after 1833. Explanations for low enrollment and absenteeism in the reports of school inspectors in 1837-56 are full of comments about the negligence, ignorance, greed, lack of appreciation of knowledge, and:

the indifference of some parents who do not want for their children a benefit whose advantages they cannot comprehend because they themselves are deprived of it. (cited in Maynes, 1985: 105)

The advocates of the new basic education do not patronize. None of them talk of Guizot's "enlightenment", or of "civilization" for the "primitive" or "backward" masses. They have only the best of intentions. It does not matter that they cannot agree on the composition of their basic education. The fact that there are so many suggestions is simply a symptom of the extreme human resource deficiency that exists in the Sahel. Nor does it matter that there are radical differences in social, economic, political and cultural circumstances between the industrial nations, from which the advocates draw their ideas, and the Sahel. Clearly, these differences are largely caused by the differences in levels of education.

And it does not matter that what they say and do seem to be tiresome repetitions of ideas that have failed time and again since 1816. As the French inspectors pointed out, the people are simply too uneducated to appreciate the value of basic education. Under these circumstances, progress is slow. Advocates must keep trying because the history of the industrial nations shows that persistence, even if it takes three or four hundred years, eventually brings success. Missionary work is difficult, but it does have its virtues.

When logic is closed, in the sense that everything seems to have a perfectly credible explanation, one is dealing with a culture that is almost immune to change. That is perhaps why it has lasted for such a long time. This is not to say that there is something inherently wrong with missionary work. Blind faith has almost always served as a useful vehicle for marketing new forms of education. It was a driving force for many French inspectors throughout the 19th century. But missionary work that seems unable to learn from centuries of failure (or, in the view of workers, from centuries of very slow success) does suggest the possibility of a serious problem of cultural backwardness among too many advocates of basic education.

One area where this problem has shown its capacity for slowing rather helping literacy and education is the lack of appreciation of the relationship between literacy and religion and, in the Sahel, of the special historical relationship between Islam and secular education.

c. Secular Education and Islam

The colonial administration in West Africa favored European secular and mission schools. Assistance to Koranic schools and Medersas was rare. Also, as we suggested earlier, the treatment of these schools was driven less by education interests than by fear of certain Islamic movements. In 1950, for instance, the authorities in Tchad discovered that while 700 students enrolled in a Koranic school in the city of Abeche, only 50 were in the secular primary school. They responded by creating a Franco-Arab school. Thus, although the requirement for

Muslims to master the teachings of the Koran was and remains a powerful social incentive for sending children to school and for acquiring literacy (in literary Arabic), the colonial powers undermined it by trying to control or to suppress the Islamic schools. After independence, governments continued to suppress the demand for education by promoting only the secular system that they got from the Europeans.

This suppression was inadvertent. It stemmed from the logical impossibility of a pure "secular" education. Except for less emphasis on religious instruction, when the Republican governments emerged victorious from their battles with the Catholic church, the secular education that followed was little different than before. It could not be otherwise. Western European culture, whether "liberal" or "conservative", is inseparable from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Secular education in the United States is equally inseparable from this tradition.

The Sahelian societies never searched for forms of education that might respond to the different circumstances and aspirations of the many ethnic, religious and language groups that reside in the region. They only received what Europeans and North Americans brought to them. The centerpiece of this gift was the Christian version of the secular school. For better or worse, there is no such thing as a secular school in the eyes of many or most faithful Muslims. These schools do not teach reading and recitation of the Koran in Arabic. They do not reinforce morals and conduct that are consistent with the faith. What they do in terms of altering the attitudes and behaviors of children is often intolerable. Any child that attends such a facility returns as a Christian by definition. Therefore, the facilities that governments and donor agencies call schools are not really schools. The literacy they teach, in French or another language, has no social use. The basic education that they provide is not education.

In this respect the Sahel is both the same and different from the industrial nations. Islam insists upon knowledge of the Koran, the ability to recite it, the ability to read it and, most important, the ability to live by it. This social demand for learning and literacy is little different from what it was and is among the Christian faiths. The main differences between the the Sahel and the industrial nations, besides the level of economic development, has been the lack of possibilities for Islamic education to evolve its own version of secular education. The closest approximation of such an education exists only in the "Islamic Republic" of Mauritania where Islam is the state religion and where most of the population speaks Arabic. This may (or may not) explain why enrollment growth in that country, as we shall see later, has been the highest among the larger nations of the region since independence.

In any event, it seems to us that the cultural backwardness that has prevented advocates of basic education from being sensitive to the relationship between

literacy, secular education and Islam is in need of change. There has been more talk in recent years about having governments and donor agencies provide additional support to Koranic schools and Medersas so that they may gradually incorporate components of the national curriculum. This is a promising step for schools in areas where the national curriculum has value. But the backwardness still reveals itself in lack of proposals to support these schools to improve the quality only of "religious" instruction -- because pure "religious" instruction, to most secular minds, is not a legitimate expression of basic education. These minds still find it difficult to grasp the idea that the religious-secular distinction is a recent Christian construct and has little meaning to many Muslims. There is only "way-of-life" education.

We would be more convinced that the barrier of culture was eroding if someone were to propose, for instance, the creation of a semi-autonomous "Islamic Education Commission". Perhaps following the Japanese, i.e. to visit and to draw inspiration, ideas and technical assistance from Islamic countries to the north and east, such a commission would gradually develop and operate a system of schools that has "religious" instruction at its core and that adds "non-religious" materials only as necessary to meet the demands of parents in different areas. In historical terms, this kind of approach would duplicate the paths followed by Catholic and Protestant education in the industrial societies before their cultural conversion to secularism.

d. Toward Democratic Practice

The allegation of cultural backwardness, of course, is simply a judgment by one ("our") culture of another ("their") culture within the congregation of individuals and institutions that inhabit the political class. Our culture may not be inherently better. However, it is of more recent origin (we hesitate to call it "modern") and its articles of faith have demonstrated a capacity to be more effective in many areas than traditional approaches. One article of this faith is that all adults are equally expert at what they know and at judging what they themselves need to learn. As we have noted, differences in existing knowledge and demand for new knowledge are evidence of differences in circumstances and interest. It therefore follows that if people seem uninterested or slow to respond to an idea, fault is more likely to lie with the idea than with the people.

A second article of this faith is that if there is compelling reason for one group of people to convince another group that they should learn something new, it is usually more effective to use what the second group might already want to learn for reaching this goal than to exhort them, to excoriate them, or to compel them to do it. From this it follows that if the first group has little idea about what the other group might want to learn, the best way to proceed is to ask them, to talk

with them, to argue with them and, if appropriate, eventually to develop both a curriculum and a method of instruction with them. This is a third article of faith. In commerce and economics these ideas express themselves as trust in consumer sovereignty, rationality, the power of marketing and incentives, and so on. We prefer to think of them as fundamental principles of blind faith in the culture of democratic social practice.

This faith suggests to us that there might be more hope for progress in literacy if basic education ideas for, say, rural Tchad not only searched for forms of basic education that might make sense to more Muslim families but also on: new animal traps; rhetoric; sewing and knitting; hairdressing; sex; and, most importantly, advanced aphrodisiacs. As we thought about it, several of us came to the conclusion that we ourselves would have been much happier in our youth and more interested in reading had we benefitted from some of this knowledge on our own roads to literacy. In any event, this is only one of a myriad of possibilities. The point is that the characteristics of indispensable education that we outlined above make apparent that if there is a will to make the curricula of schools and other methods of instruction more engaging to families by basing them on the foundation of existing interest in knowledge of various kinds, there is likely to be a way.

This does not mean that the current curricula of all primary schools must change. There is a considerable demand for literacy and for the other knowledge and skills that schools already provide. This demand seems to derive mainly from perceived opportunities for employment in government and large enterprises, participation in commerce and, because chances to take advantage of these opportunities are enhanced by certificates, more advanced education. This demand tends to concentrate in towns.

In some rural areas demand also derives from the emergence of opportunities to make immediate use of literacy and other skills, mainly in commerce. Here there may be need for flexible curricula that, while retaining the core of literacy and language training required for prospective access to secondary schools (if communities wish to maintain this link), may be adjusted to suit local conditions. The experiences of adult training programs, for example, show that literacy and bookkeeping become indispensable to families when a cooperative movement is gaining momentum in a village. Where new seeds are used, certain pieces of agricultural science draw interest. Where adults find it useful to learn these things, most also think that their children would benefit. Occasionally, introduction of literacy, bookkeeping and the like in places that are on the verge of economic expansion seems able to bring cooperative movements, agricultural experimentation and other innovations to fruition more quickly than might otherwise be the case.

Unfortunately, the rate of diffusion of conditions that allow literacy to become indispensable or a catalyst for economic change is very slow. It is here that new ideas may prove helpful if there is a compulsion to promote increases in the rate of literacy. However, although we can imagine many types of schools, school systems and other forms of instruction that might prove effective, these and any other ideas that people in government and in donor agencies might care to present remain ideas of the political class. They are not ideas that emerge autonomously from the rest of the population or from discussions with them.

In this respect the challenge of promoting literacy or other elements of knowledge is also a challenge of promoting new forms of politics. Earlier we noted that the majority of the population who are supposed to be the main beneficiaries of the new basic education are outside the arena of ideas and of politics. They do not have voice in affairs of education, or in anything else for that matter. They and their ideas were not present at the meetings of 1976, 1989 and 1990. They and their ideas have not mattered since 1816. This is the only reason that the cultural backwardness and colonial mentality that shape discussions of the new basic education have persisted for such a long time. This culture and mentality have not been under pressure to change and to move into the 21st century precisely because political development in the Sahelian countries, at best, is still at the same level as in France at the beginning of the 19th century.

People who make proposals regarding basic education in the Sahel, especially those from industrial countries who are parents, might better understand what we mean if they were to imagine what would happen if their own authorities were to propose that all schools devote half of all teaching to Japanese language instruction and the other half to memorizing the Koran. There would be a mass outcry and protest, just as there often is (in the United States) about less dramatic suggestions for sex and religious education. It is precisely because of this potential for immediate and devastating political response that such suggestions do not come forward very often.

For the same reason, the vocabularies in the industrial societies have had to adjust to political realities. It has become much harder, at least in public, to refer to people in different ethnic or religious groups with words that these people might find offensive. Eventually these terms will disappear completely. There is no such thing as an American "peasant" for example. They are always "farmers".

An important impediment to promotion of new forms of politics, therefore, is lack of democratic processes that extend themselves into and through the entire population. Elections might help, but the process of broadening the size of political constituencies is likely to take a very long time to run its course. Thus what is necessary in the interim are voluntary "champions" of democratic social practice to pursue another kind of missionary work and to bring enlightenment and the

civilizing influence of the 21st century to the backward masses in government and donor agencies. Although we cannot be sure, we think that this may make it possible to bring universal literacy to the Sahel in less than the century or two that we estimate it will take with continued reliance on traditional approaches.

The requirement for a new kind of missionary work does not derive only from our reflections upon basic education. We see the use for it in many other areas. Such work seems especially urgent to dispel animistic canons about the relationship between education, productivity, and economic development.

V. EDUCATION AND PRODUCTIVITY

The idea that the purpose of education is to increase labor and household productivity, and thus economic growth, has been an important concept in the political class for the last two or three decades. Some people subscribe to it because they believe that education has the capacity to produce the increases. Others, more skeptical, adopt it because it is a useful way to market their deep conviction that more education is better than less. The sub-cultures within many donor agencies do not permit actions to be based explicitly on pure acts of faith. There must be a "rational" reason for doing one thing instead of another. This is especially the case among agencies that view "development" as the principal justification for their existence. Then there are those who rely upon the idea as a method to explain political decisions. Even if true, it is not congenial to say that the reason that an agency should issue a grant or a loan is that a government asked for it.

Whatever their rationales may be, people who use the idea have had the advantage of being able to refer to studies that seem to show a statistical relationship between more time spent in schools and higher productivity. One example is a recent report by the Education and Employment Division of the Population and Human Resources Department in the World Bank's Sector Policy and Research unit. It argues for increased investment in primary schools because the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and problem-solving that these schools provide have "... direct positive effects on earnings, farm productivity, and human fertility, as well as inter-generational effects on child health, nutrition and education." (World Bank, 1990: 10).

The report supports its argument by referring to studies that show five things. First, attendance at primary schools yield high private returns to individuals and high social returns to society as a whole. Second, attendance increases productivity of small farms by 7 to 10 percent. Third, women with more years of attendance have fewer children than women with fewer years. Fourth, the

children of these women have mortality rates that are half those of other children. Fifth, the children of parents who went to school are more likely to enroll in school and to complete more years than other children. In similar fashion, another report by the same division refers to these studies and concludes that there "... is now a persuasive body of theoretical and empirical evidence that investment in the formal education and training of the labor force plays a crucial role in economic development." (Haddad et al., 1990: 3).

In the Sahel this evidence includes a benefit-cost analysis for Burkina Faso. The analysis suggests that social rates of return were 20 percent for primary schools, 15 percent for secondary schools, and 21 percent for more advanced schools in 1982 (Psacharopoulos, 1985). Though the World Bank reports did not refer to them directly, one also may presume that this kind of evidence includes estimates of social and private returns in Niger by Mingat, Jarousse and Lailaba (1988) and by Oudin et al. (1988).

This evidence is more persuasive to individuals and institutions that focus on promoting primary schools, such as staff and consultants in the Education and Employment Division, than to others. For example, in order for the social return to primary schools in Burkina Faso to have been 20 percent, the average wage received by individuals who completed their studies had to be about 500 percent greater than the average wage of those who never attended school. The characteristics of the labor market in Burkina Faso implies that this difference occurred because the analysis compared employees of government, para-statal organizations and large private firms who received high wages against workers outside these organizations who received very low wages.

If the forces of supply and demand in a free market determined the wages, i.e. where wages reflected the productivity of the workers, then one could claim a high social return. But wages in government and in large firms were not determined by a free market. They were determined by the state in response to political factors. As a result, the wages could not measure only differences in the productivity of workers. They also measured the effect of political connections and credentials. At the very least, the return of 20 percent was an exaggeration. Because most workers with high wages were employed by the government, and because the productivity of government is generally low, the social return may have been zero or less in Burkina Faso.

With respect to farmers, both the World Bank reports rely heavily on a review article done by Lockheed, Jamison, and Lau (1980). This article looked at data from several studies of farmers. When averaged together these data seemed to suggest that 4 years of school were associated with a positive productivity difference of about 7 percent. The focus on the "average" masked the wide

variation in the findings of each set of data. Often, more time at school was associated with a negative productivity difference.

After dividing the studies into two categories, one for farmers in expanding economic environments and the other for those in stagnant ones, Lockheed, Jamison, and Lau also suggested that the average difference in productivity between farmers who did and did not attend school was 10 percent in the growth areas and negligible in the other environments. The authors interpreted this to mean that schools had a greater impact on productivity in expanding areas than in stagnant ones. They again ignored variations on each side of the averages. These variations showed that productivity differences were negative in some expanding areas and positive in some stagnant ones.

The data available to support the idea that attendance at school directly enhances productivity is therefore weak. Weaker still is the reasoning used to interpret the data. For instance, the authors neglected to mention the possibility of self-selection effects. Farmers coming from higher-income families might have had increased probabilities of going to school in their youth and being more productive in adulthood than those from lower-income households (i.e. attendance and productivity may be jointly determined by other factors).

We did our own econometric analysis of 1988 data from Ghana to illustrate the nature of the issue. The objective of the analysis was to examine the impact of the highest level that individuals attained in school (no matter how many years they took to reach it) on the difference in earnings (i.e. profits) between the individuals. The data covered about 2,500 self-employed individuals (i.e. small businesses with only one worker) in five sectors: food manufacturing, textile manufacturing, other manufacturing, commerce, and services.

After controlling for all the factors available in the data that might influence earnings, we prepared (regression) equations for each sex and for each of four age groups. Figures A and B show the results of these equations for individuals who were approximately 30 years of age. When the data for all sectors are combined, the equations suggest that each year of additional school attainment results in a 3 percent increase in earnings for men and a 1 percent increase for women. But the equations for men and women in each sector show considerable dispersion. Each year of additional attainment results in a significant decrease in earnings for men and an increase for women in food manufacturing. The directions are the reverse in textiles and services. They are positive for both men and women in other manufacturing and commerce.

If we felt compelled to make a case that there is or is not a relationship between school attainment and earnings, we would only need to select the specific equations that can strengthen the argument. The truth of the matter is that the

Figure A

Education and Earnings in Ghana, 1988 Independent Workers

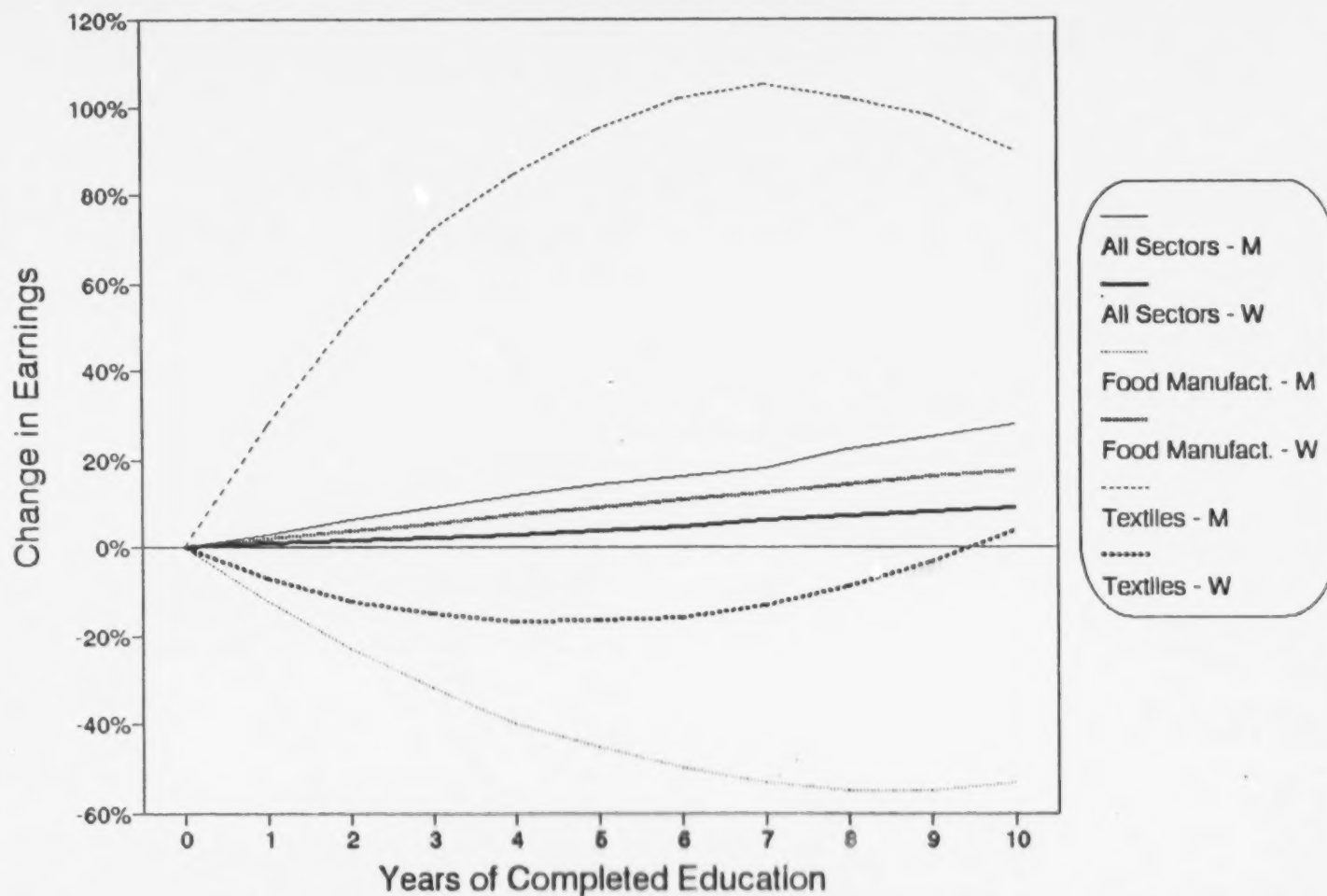
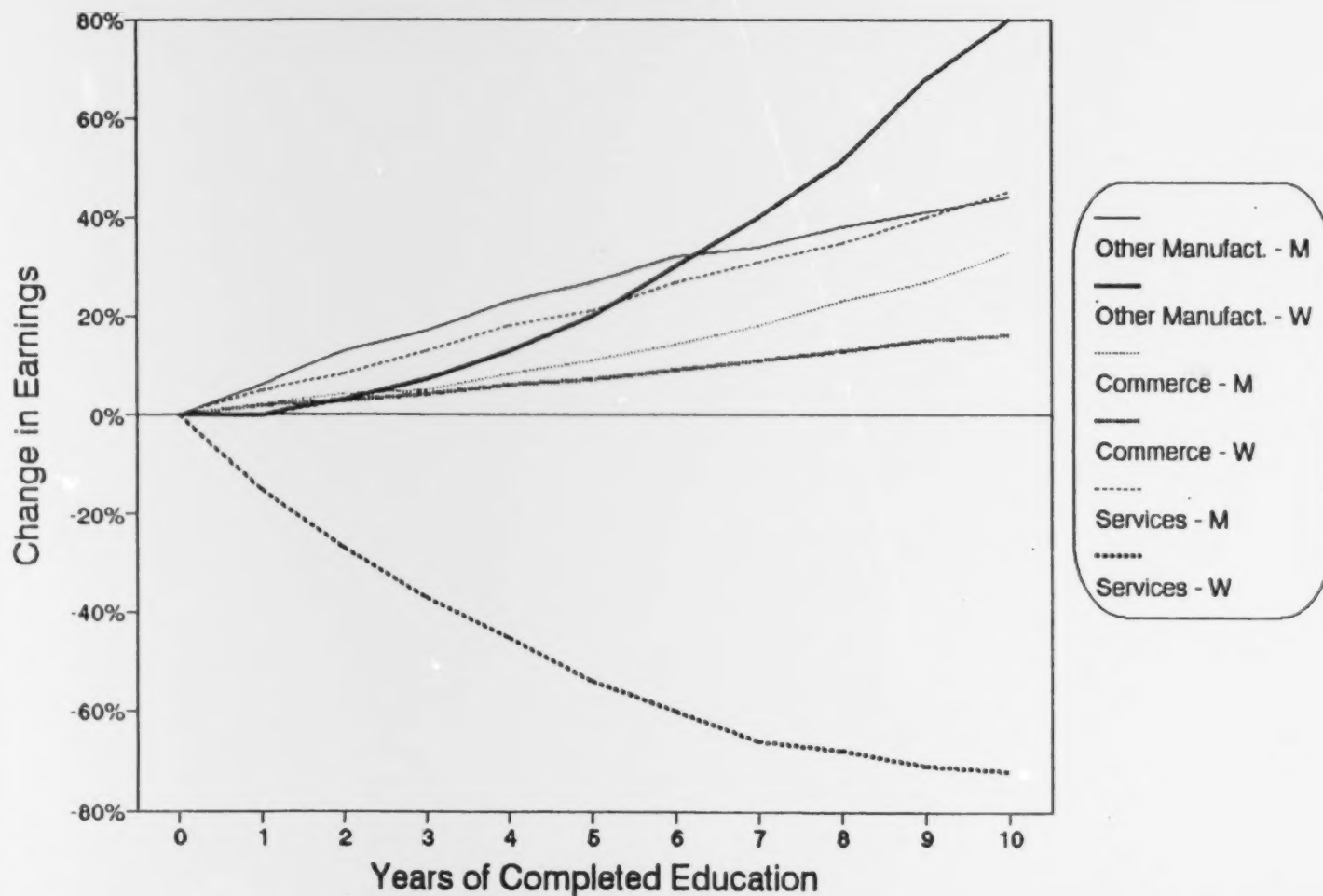


Figure B

Education and Earnings in Ghana, 1988 Independent Workers



data do not support either claim. The data do not permit us to account for the effects of other crucial variables such as family background factors, ability, motivation, or the regions in which the workers live.

The questions we raise here are not new. Researchers in universities have asked them for a long time. However, most people who work in donor agencies and governments have neither the patience nor the specialized training to search for opaque articles in obscure journals. Even if they do not subscribe to the belief that World Bank documents are authoritative sources of reliable information, these documents are much easier to find and to read. As a result, there has been little reason to question the existence of a positive relationship between schools, productivity and development.

This situation may be changing because the question is now being raised by other units within the World Bank. Important among these units is the Welfare and Human Resources Development Division. It is in the same department of the Bank as the Education and Employment Division that we mentioned above. This unit employs many staff and consultants who do not seem to show a bias for or against schools.

A report by one of these individuals argues that methods used to calculate rates of returns in the past produced very misleading results (Glewwe, 1990). For comparison he uses the same Ghana data that we discussed above. He shows that returns to completion of 6, 9, 12, and more than 12 grades of school in Ghana were respectively 0.9, 2.9, 2.0 and 1.4 percent among wage employees in the public sector, and 1.1, 9.5, 5.0 and 1.1 percent in the private sector. Unfortunately, his method of explaining why these figures were so much lower than in neighboring countries was unsatisfactory. He claimed that it was because the quality of schools in Ghana was low. He lacked data by which to compare quality in Ghana with quality in the other countries, however. The explanation was also unsatisfactory because an important reason for the result was that he accounted for the education level of parents. Other studies did not do this.

In a more general review of the literature that emerged from the same unit of the Bank, Behrman (1990) lists many shortcomings of the studies that show high returns to education. These include failures: (1) to use mathematics correctly; (2) to account for family connections, ability and motivation; (3) to distinguish between quantity of education (years) and quality; (4) to control for geographic aggregation (e.g. blending samples drawn from poor areas having limited capital and low levels of schooling with samples from wealthy areas having more capital and higher levels of schooling); (5) to control for school dropouts and repeaters; and (6) to consider household and community characteristics. He also notes that several recent analyses that have fewer of these shortcomings, such as Glewwe's work, all show returns that are much lower than previously estimated.

Behrman repeats this exercise for studies that claim to show a strong and positive relationship between schools and household productivity, e.g. the effects of the school attendance of parents on health, mortality, nutrition, children's education, and fertility. He again makes a strong case that the independent influence of schools on these items, particularly the effect of women's attendance, seems also to have been exaggerated. Causes of these household productivity benefits, if there are any specific ones to find, have yet to be identified.

Of course, econometric studies are not the only basis for questioning the idea of a strong causal connection between schools and productivity and growth. The work of historians is instructive. Cipolla (1969), Cubberly (1919), Furet and Ozouf (1977), Graff (1987), Kayashima (1989), Maynes (1985) and Resnick (1983), among many others, are consistent in their findings. After financial and institutional constraints on sending children to school were removed, even after governments began to compel parents to send them, farm families were the last to show interest in doing so. And the further away an area was from urban and industrial centers, the lower the level of interest. There were exceptions to this, as in Massachusetts, but productivity gains were not part of the story.

As others have done through the ages, one could imply that cultural factors among all farmers everywhere always prevented and still prevents them from seeing the benefits of schools. This is too facile. Greater respect for their intelligence and understanding of their circumstances would suggest that farmers showed little interest because schools offered them fewer benefits than costs. Viewed in the light of the recent econometric studies, it seems plausible to infer that farmers assessed the relative merits of schools correctly.

In any event, what makes the recent World Bank studies important is not their content. We noted that the findings are not new. They are important because they emerge from within the World Bank and from within the same department as earlier studies. When this happens it is usually more difficult for subsequent Bank documents to be as assertive as previous ones about the relationship between schools and productivity. It is possible that the Bank might eventually require all doubts to surrender themselves to the political imperative of justifying more loans for schools. This happens occasionally. For the moment the key thing is that these internal doubts are becoming more public. If this continues the infection may spread to other donor institutions, and may make it much harder for them to maintain their faith in the idea or to use it for other purposes. This would be a welcome change.

In saying this we do not mean to suggest that there is no connection between schools and growth. There is enough statistical and historical evidence to suggest the presence of some kind of relationship. The problem is that too many individuals and institutions who concern themselves with this relationship

overstate both its strength and its direction. As a result, they focus almost entirely on the supply of schools. They ignore the demand for the services that schools offer. Related to this last item, they also ignore the difference between schools and education.

VI. THE DEMAND FOR SCHOOLS

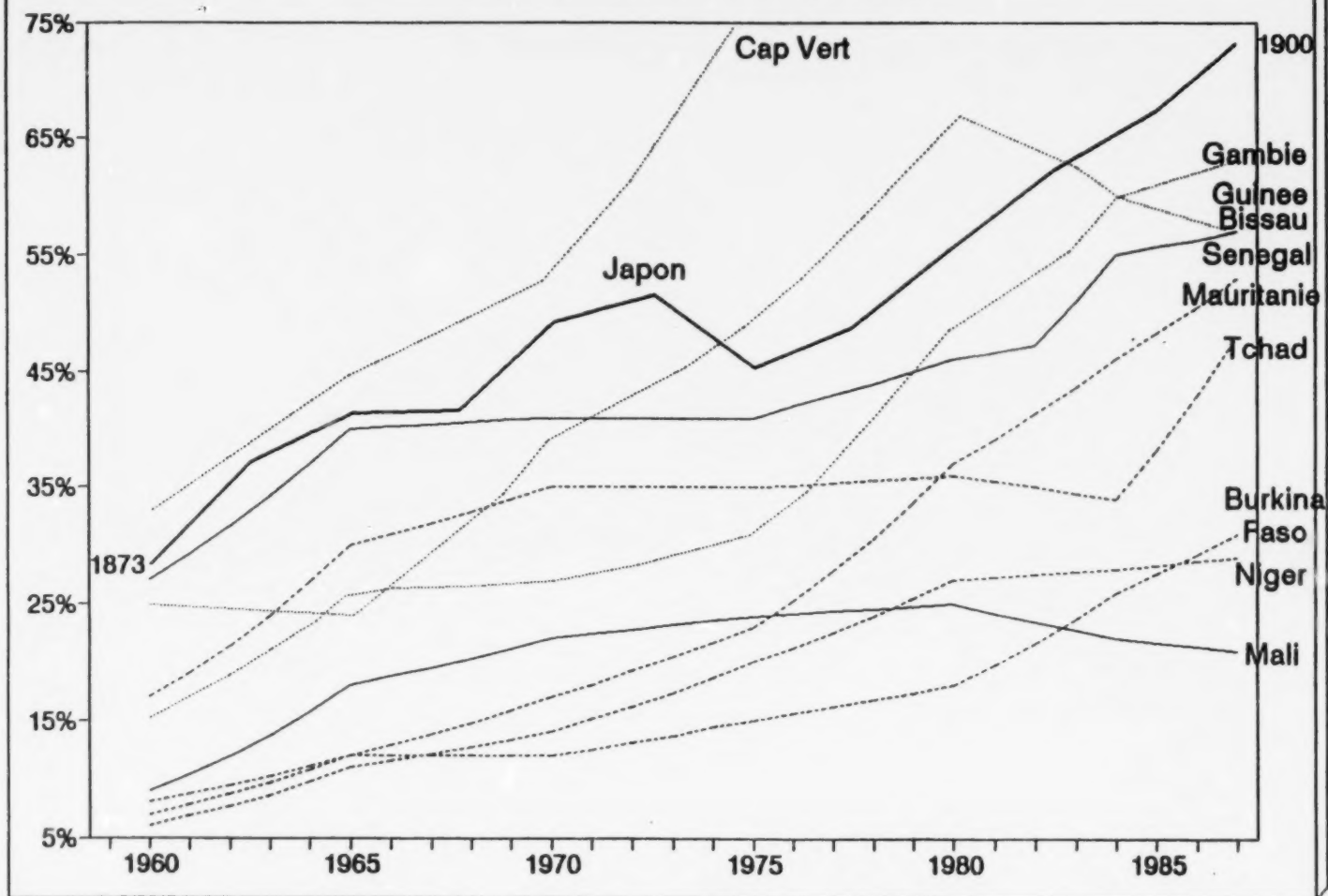
In our review of colonial education we mentioned that interest in schools was strong in a few areas and negligible in most others at independence. Parents in towns and in rural areas undergoing economic expansion, governments, and donor agencies felt compelled to make up for lost time. They did this exceptionally well in terms of numbers of people attending class. Statistics on growth of primary, secondary and higher education enrollment rates, i.e. increases in the percentage of school-age youth enrolled in schools, suggest that the pace of growth in the region was as high or higher after 1960 than in Europe, North America or Japan during their respective periods of sustained expansion in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The distribution of this growth across the landscape has also been similar to the experience of the industrial nations, especially with respect to primary education. Cap Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Gambia, Senegal, and Mauritania, the coastal countries that benefitted more from economic development, show higher growth than the interior nations: Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Tchad (see Figure C). Expansion in areas with larger towns and more dynamic economies within these countries is higher than in other areas. Rates for boys are higher than for girls. The ability of growth in enrollment to make a sizeable impact on the rate of adult literacy remains limited.

These statistics have been accompanied by considerable commentary. There are claims that enrollment rates are too low in some or at all levels of schooling (e.g. Ki-Zerbo, 1990; CILSS, 1990). They are too low among important segments of the population such as women, certain ethnic or religious groups, and the poor. They are not high enough in certain areas. These comments draw inspiration from the belief that literacy is inherently good, that schools provide education in all social and economic circumstances, and that this education will raise income and productivity. Most World Bank documents that refer to the Sahel say that enrollment rates in these countries are too low because they are less than the average for Africa as a whole. The reports never explain why the rates should be the same everywhere. There are also those who do not profess any faith. As for statements about the relationship between education and productivity, their comments only serve to justify political imperatives that cannot be easily

Figure C

Taux de scolarisation bruts - primaire
Gross enrollment rates - primary



L'évolution des taux de scolarisation, 1960-1987
Enrollment rates, 1960-1987

	Burkina Faso	Cap Vert	Gambi	Guinee Bissau	Mali	Mauritanie	Niger	Senegal	Tchad	Ensemble All Sahel	Reste/ Rest of Afrique
Primaire/Primary (%)											
1960	8	33	15	25	9	7	6	27	17	16	39
1965	12	45	26	24	18	12	11	40	30	24	51
1970	12	53	27	39	22	17	14	41	35	29	57
1975	15	125	31	49	24	23	20	41	35	45	67
1980	18	112	49	67	25	37	27	46	36	46	83
1984	26	109	60	60	22	46	26	55	34	49	80
1987	31	108	63	57	21	53	29	57	48	52	77
Secondaire/Secondary (%)											
1960	0.4	11.8	4.0	2.7	0.7	0.4	0.3	3.0	0.4	2.6	2.9
1965	1.0	7.7	7.0	2.0	3.7	1.4	0.6	6.7	1.0	3.5	4.4
1970	1.4	10.1	10.0	8.0	4.8	2.4	1.2	9.8	2.0	5.5	8.3
1975	1.8	6.5	10.0	3.4	6.8	4.2	2.2	10.4	3.0	5.4	10.3
1980	2.7	7.8	13.0	5.9	8.1	10.9	5.0	11.2	5.0	7.7	18.3
1984	3.8	10.9	18.0	8.8	6.3	14.7	6.0	12.7	6.0	9.7	20.9
1987	5.7	14.7	18.0	8.4	5.7	16.0	6.4	14.0	6.0	10.5	22.0
Superieure/Higer (%)											
1960	0.0				0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.1	0.2
1965	0.0				0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0	0.2	0.2
1970	0.0				0.1	0.0	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.2	0.6
1975	0.2				0.5	0.0	0.1	1.9	0.2	0.5	1.0
1980	0.3				0.8	1.4	0.3	2.7	0.3	1.0	1.5
1984	0.6				1.0	2.6	0.6	2.3	0.4	1.3	1.7
1987	0.9				1.0	4.8	0.7	2.8	0.7	1.8	2.0

Sources: CILSS, 1990; CMET, 1990.

Données de base sur la scolarisation, 1987 Basic education statistics, 1987
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	Burkina Faso	Cap Vert	Gambi	Guinée Bissau	Mali	Mauritanie	Niger	Senegal	Tchad	Ensemble All Sahel	Reste/ Rest of Afrique
Taux d'alphabétisation/ Adult literacy rate (%):	13	47	25	31	17		14	28	25	25	49
Taux de scolarisation bruts/ Gross enrollment rate											
Primaire/Primary (%)											
garçons/boys:	41	112	80	73	29	61	37	71	73	62	87
filles/girls:	24	106	46	40	17	42	20	49	29	40	66
Secondaire/Secondary (%)											
garçons/boys:	8	15	26	11	9	23	9	19	10	14	29
filles/girls:	4	14	10	4	4	9	3	10	2	6	14
Depenses publiques/ Government expenditure											
comme % PIB / as % GDP	3.7	2.8	4.1	2.8	3	5	2.5	4.8	1.5	3.4	4.3
comme % budget/as % budget	22	15	22	16	25	22	18	24	12	20	15
PNB/GNP per capita (\$EU/\$US)	190	500	220	160	210	440	260	520	150	294	389

Sources: CILSS, 1990; CMET, 1990.

explained in any other way, such as building more schools to favor constituents with jobs and contracts.

The opposite view holds that growth in enrollment is too high. This view emerges from a similar complex of beliefs and purposes. People who take this position do not question the value of schools or the belief that schools provide education. They talk about what economists call "opportunity costs". Spending for schools means not spending for other things such as roads, wells, agriculture, health or other items of importance. Resources devoted to increases in enrollment cannot be used to maintain or improve the quality of instruction. Investment in production of large numbers of secondary and higher-level graduates who cannot find jobs seems a waste of resources. Also of concern are what economists call "externalities". The consequences that might result from an expanding army of the "educated unemployed", a concept that reveals more about the unclear reasoning of those who use it than about the phenomenon itself, is one example.³

These comments were common in the industrial nations for two or three hundred years. Before attendance at primary school and literacy became universal, and before secondary schools became universally accessible, rates were either too low for some or, as for Colbert and De La Chatolais, too high for others. There was never any truth to these arguments. They were always personal opinions or political necessities.

Nevertheless, these comments were important elements of the historical processes by which school systems developed. Without declarations that enrollment or literacy was too low, there would have been less social pressure for increases in the supply of schools. Without assertions that it was too high, there might have been less attention to the need for balance in investments across different economic and social sectors, to quality, or to relationships between the supply and the demand for graduates. The comments were and remain part of the permanent "nagging" force that is produced by and that promotes social change.

³ People who worry about the "educated unemployed" seem unaware that high unemployment rates of secondary school graduates are normal in most countries. What has been abnormal in the Sahelian countries was the absence of such unemployment before. Similarly, those who worry about the political consequences of these unemployed individuals and who therefore propose a lowering of their numbers are apparently unable to understand that unemployment is a luxury that only the relatively wealthy and politically influential can afford. The unemployed are from families in that matter in political terms, as are most of the future unemployed who are still in school. Thus any effort to constrain admissions or graduation rates should be no less worrisome as the fact that the graduates cannot find work quickly enough.

We should mention, though, that the available statistics do not seem sufficiently reliable to sustain comments of any kind. For the most part, the total population, age structure, fertility rate, mortality rate and other numbers required to estimate the size and growth of the school-age population in 1960-90 are heroic guesses based on incomplete census surveys. Regarding numbers of students, the data come from reports by school directors to government inspectors and from the inspectors to central administrators. The capabilities of these individuals vary and the conditions under which many of them work are difficult. The data sometimes include non-government schools. At other times they exclude them. Sometimes they show enrollments at the start of the school year. At other times they are for later periods when dropouts have affected the initial figures. Many reports do not reach the central administration.

Any statistic for Tchad in 1980 is suspect because the country was at the height of its civil war at the time. Any statistic for 1988-89 is also suspect. In a report for the World Bank, Orivel and Perrot (1990) indicate that the primary enrollment rate for that year was 32 to 37 percent according to the education ministry's planning service, and 56 percent according to the inspection service. The authors then made their own estimate: 49 percent. Similarly, for Niger, we collected four different sets of figures for the period 1980-89 that government representatives presented at various international meetings in 1989 and 1990.

In Mali our inquiries about the current primary enrollment rate yielded answers ranging from less than 20 to more than 30 percent. The one individual with all the official statistics in his computer at the education ministry could not say with certainty if they included all government schools or if they included all non-government schools. Besides difficulties with enrollment, literacy statistics in all countries suffer from lack of a common definition for the term and by the lack of means to test for any particular definition. Then there is the problem presented by the tendency of staff and consultants in several donor agencies to adjust the numbers for various purposes, such as trying to make them more "credible" (e.g. Orivel and Perrot).

But the reliability of the statistics is a minor matter. More exact numbers would not alter the comments. People always believe that the rates, whatever they may be, are too low or too high. They always rise too slowly or too quickly.

More important is that comments about enrollment do not reveal a sufficient grasp of the nature of demand for schools. Those who complained about what they saw as a drop in enrollment in recent years, or in the rate of growth of enrollment, explained this phenomenon in several ways. These included: a fall in the quality of instruction associated with over-extension of fiscal resources; the inability of governments to continue the practice of employing all secondary school graduates; droughts and other economic downturns that raised the opportunity costs of

schooling for parents and students; elimination of school canteens supported by the World Food Program in certain countries; and increases in fees charged to parents.⁴

The list of explanations did not include the possibility that growth might have slowed because most of the people for whom primary and secondary schools could be useful were already enrolled. This explanation would have required an understanding that schools, especially primary schools, do not offer benefits to everyone.

If parents enroll their children in an existing school or undertake efforts to get one, it may be because they feel that the facility provides instruction in certain subjects that they consider important, such as literacy or a new language. This usually occurs, as we have suggested several times, when economic development evolves in a locality and presents new opportunities for making practical use of the literacy and language skills. An interesting example of this phenomenon, in part because it shows that governments can often be effective with actions to increase the demand for schools as well as with actions to supply schools, is Tchad.

Acting primarily through Associations of Parents of Students, parents, teachers, administrators and inspectors in communities cut off from the state by the civil war assumed most of the functions of the education ministry throughout the 1980s. Their activities reportedly include construction of 3,500 classrooms (about 33 percent of the national total), provision of books and materials, payment of cash and in-kind salaries to 2,500 teachers (about 40 percent), and organization of regional school inspection services. This phenomenon is more widespread in the Christian and animist south than in the Muslim north.

Part of the reason, as we implied earlier in reference to the Franco-Arab school in Abeche, is historical. Missionaries brought Christianity and schooling to the south in 1947 with approval of colonial administration. Interest in schools was therefore already high at the start of the civil war, as were enrollment rates. In the north the administration discouraged the expansion of Islamic learning. Unable or unwilling to treat Islamic and Christian schools as equivalent, the authorities did not build on the interest that northern parents showed for Islamic education. Those who can afford it continue to send their children to schools across the border in Sudan or Egypt.

⁴ Those aware of the limitations of the data and who realized that they could not substantiate claims of systematic deterioration, such as Orivel and Perrot (1990), also conceded that the phenomenon might simply result from improvements or deterioration in the collection of statistics.

Another part of the reason was economic. Besides having a higher density and more sedentary population, the south had more community resources at its disposal and more tangible incentives to promote schooling. An important source of the resources was the "refunds" made by Cotontchad (a government corporation that promotes cotton production) to communities that established "self-managed markets". (Gouvernement du Tchad, 1990). Cotontchad and the agriculture ministry introduced these markets in 1975 to lower their costs of marketing. In exchange for the refunds, which were separate from payments to individuals for their cotton, the markets performed weighing, classification, maintenance and management activities that would otherwise require more costly use of Cotontchad personnel.

An important aspect here was that Cotontchad would not recognize a market unless the Village Association had at least 35 tons of cotton to sell and, more important, unless it contained at least two (and no more than eight) farmers who were literate in French. This rule offered a strong incentive for adults to become literate and to send their children to school. The Associations used these refunds not only for supporting charity, wells and village pharmacies, but also to create and maintain their schools. Cotontchad estimated that self-managed markets processed 62% of cotton tonnage in 1989-90. It hopes to expand operations to cover 2,500 village associations by 1993-94.

However, the connection between schools and economic growth can express itself in other ways. When development appears it also may make new demands on the time of parents. Even if what happens inside a school seems pointless, parents may see in it a useful day-care service. If the school offers a nutrition service through a canteen, so much the better. As national economic development proceeds, governments have more resources available to enforce the compulsory education laws that they enacted for purposes such as political socialization of the French, American or Japanese variety. Social pressure to enroll children increases in local communities as more people send children to school. If income is rising, there are also improvements in health and mortality, and declines in fertility. As these things evolve, public and private employers may find it useful to use school certificates as a simple method of screening applicants for employment.

Statistics that reflect these and other underlying processes will show a relationship between enrollment growth, productivity and economic development. In these instances it is the process of economic growth that produces an increase in the demand for schools. It should also be clear that this demand may or may not have something to do with education.

Schools are simply places where young people gather for various reasons. To the extent that these people learn things no matter where they are or what they do, learning of some kind does occur in a school. They can learn many things and can

even get certificates. But it does not follow that they receive the kinds of specific knowledge and skills that one could consider "education". Education implies not only a structured process of learning things that cannot easily be learned only through experience, but also, as we have said, learning those things that have particular applications in specific social and economic contexts. Depending on the nature of these contexts, schools may or may not offer education. More important: education, especially of the kind that can influence productivity, may or may not require schools.

Although some research studies use the term "schooling" to imply a difference between attendance at school and education, the general failure to make a distinction between the two terms has been unfortunate. It has led to a presumption that the share of a population that reaches one or another level in a school system (or that acquires a skill that schools may offer such as literacy) is a reliable measure of the quantity or quality of a society's "human resources". Logically, therefore, the principal method by which one can improve these resources is to invest more in expanding enrollment.

This logic fails to appreciate that schools are very special social institutions. They emerged slowly in the industrial nations in step with and in response to particular needs that flowed from social, economic, political and other changes. Moreover, the various services that the schools provided at a moment in time, including the content of instruction, reflected the needs of that moment. At many moments, especially in the early phases of development, these needs did not necessarily include learning things that could contribute to increases in productivity.

Much or most of the Sahel is still in the very early phases of a process of change that began to spread through the industrial nations in the 17th and 18th centuries. This does not necessarily mean that schools are an "inappropriate" technology for the region. It may only mean that the purposes that they serve may be very different in the Sahel than what individuals in donor agencies, who transpose their premises from the industrial nations, presume. One reason for lack of consensus in the political class during the last few decades may therefore be that the donor agencies have been trying promote ideas about the purposes of schools whose time has not yet come.

In the circumstances of the Sahel, for a long time to come the demand for primary education and literacy will derive primarily from the goal of secondary school and its certificates. We do not believe that this "should be" the principal basis of demand. Until economic progress or the evolution of forms of education that are more responsive to their interests emerge to provide other reasons for parents to send their children or themselves to school, there may be little choice in the matter. Meanwhile, there is a great deal to do to inside the existing primary schools so that, at the very least, the quality of literacy and other knowledge that

students get while they are in them gradually improves over the time. Unfortunately, the quality of thought that accompanies this effort, especially with respect to the politics of quality, often seems to fall below the level required to meet the challenge.

VII. QUALITY

Unlike the case of enrollment, where some people say that rates are too high, opinions about the quality of what takes place in schools are usually negative. Quality is never as good as it could or should be. It always seems to deteriorate as school systems expand. This tendency to be critical is natural among individuals who believe that the central purpose of primary education is to help students master literacy or other skills and subjects. Many of these individuals assume that there are no limits to what can be learned or taught, and that everyone has the potential to learn rapidly and to teach effectively. These assumptions are useful even if they are not entirely realistic. Among other things, they underwrite efforts to discover methods that can improve quality.

In this regard, extensive research in developing countries in recent years suggests that the most promising methods to raise learning outcomes in primary schools are: more selective recruitment of teachers; improved supervision and in-service training for teachers; efforts to elevate the morale of teachers; procurement of books and other instructional materials; and improvements in student nutrition and health (e.g. Heyneman, 1983). These methods provoke little controversy at a conceptual level. Most parents, students, teachers, administrators and senior officials agree with donor agencies on the principles involved. If there are disagreements, they usually flow from differences of opinion about the purposes and interests to be served during implementation of the methods.

Concerning recruitment, for example, some donor agencies use research findings to argue that selection criteria should put less emphasis on certificates and more emphasis on individual characteristics that show promise of resulting in improved teaching. Officials appreciate this reasoning. They nevertheless object because the idea undermines the capacity of governments to provide jobs to graduates of secondary and more advanced schools. Students who are about to receive their certificates tend to support this view. Current teachers and administrators might join them because the idea undermines seniority systems and salary structures (based on certificates) that are already in place and that benefit them. Parents also might object if they see that the main purpose of primary schools is to prepare children for entry and passage through secondary schools. Clearly, a teacher that has not obtained a certificate is not qualified to instruct their

children. To a greater or lesser extent, such differences of opinion affect the implementation of the other methods as well.

Besides disagreements over methods that can exert a positive influence on learning, major disputes arise in relation to ideas that seem to have little influence on learning. A study of the opinions of rural parents in Mali shows that the capacity of schools to provide their children with literacy is an important indicator of quality. However, of greater importance, because they are visible long before literacy, is the presence of: teachers that do not molest girls or do not force children to work their fields; teachers that reinforce good manners and respect for adults and traditions, especially Islamic traditions; acceptable physical conditions and adequate furnishings; and a low ratio of students to teachers (ARD, 1991).

The first two items can be addressed through supervision and training of teachers if there is an interest in doing so. Outside certain minimum standards, however, donor agencies are not enthusiastic about the second pair of items. Heavy investment in construction and furniture, and maintenance of low student-teacher ratios (i.e. much less than about 40 or 50 to 1), are costly items that seem to have little impact on learning. Parents, teachers, administrators and officials still insist upon them.

Parents may be unwilling to enroll children if their definitions of quality are not satisfied. Schools that are equipped with all necessary instructional materials and excellent teachers serve no purpose if they stand empty. Teachers prefer comfortable physical facilities as well as fewer students. Insistence upon inferior surroundings and the additional work required to manage larger numbers of students undermines morale. In addition to showing responsiveness to these concerns, officials prefer to see investment in buildings because they are tangible monuments to the government's interest in the well-being of the population. They create jobs and construction contracts. If they are financed by donor agencies, the investments are also important sources of foreign exchange.

Then there is the controversy over the language of instruction. Here debates turn on whether primary instruction should begin with a local language, with a European language (French, Portuguese or English) or with Arabic. Proponents of local languages assert that children can become literate and learn more quickly with this approach. The transition to a European language in late primary or early secondary school could then be made on a strong foundation of basic literacy and knowledge. They also add that the adoption of local languages can serve to valorize the cultures from which children come.

Advocates of European languages argue that limited literacy and learning with use of these languages derive mainly from inadequacies in resources and in instruction methods. If the issue were only language it would have been

impossible for the United States, to mention one example, to build a unified nation out of a population of millions of immigrants from all over the world. With regard to culture, they add that adoption of a common language of instruction did not undermine ethnic diversity and pride in other heterogeneous societies. Why should the situation be different in the Sahel?

The advocates then point out that with so many major and minor languages in the Sahelian countries, the cost of producing necessary materials and teachers is prohibitive. Perhaps more important are the political risks that might accompany a decision to choose some but not all local languages in different regions. In this context some of them contend that the fundamental purpose of schools from the point of view of government is creation of citizens who share a national identity. Adoption of one or more national languages that do not reflect a bias in favor of a particular group is very useful in this regard. One need only look at the way in which the Mauritanian government's proposal to make Arabic the compulsory language of instruction in 1979 increased the level of friction between the Moorish majority and the French-speaking minority in 1979.

In any event, to the extent that parents and students voice their opinions on this matter, the majority in most countries seems to want a European language and/or Arabic. The European languages offer prospects for study beyond the primary level, for employment in the government and in large firms, and for emigration to other parts of Africa and Europe. Arabic offers similar advantages. Although more limited, it opens doors to further study in Islamic secondary schools and in the Arab nations. It opens doors to employment and participation in the large-scale trade networks that Arabic-speaking merchants operate throughout the Sahel. And it satisfies the basic Muslim need to read the Koran.

Therefore, even if it is true that learning outcomes are superior with use of local languages, the parochial concern with quality must give way to concern with social, economic and political reality. The language issue has to resolve itself as slowly or as quickly as time and circumstance permit. France confronted the matter in the early 19th century when communities in various regions argued about using French rather than Flemish, German, Basque or Provencal (Maynes, 1985). North America still confronts it in the many regions of the United States where Spanish is more common than English, and in the parts of Canada where French and English compete with each other.

Most of the differences of opinion and interest discussed above are essentially the same in the Sahel as they were and remain in the industrial nations. The encouraging aspect is that many differences have shown themselves to be no more insurmountable in the Sahel than elsewhere. Although they did not completely satisfy all interests, negotiations between donors and governments have produced compromises that address many major concerns. Most primary education projects

that were financed with World Bank assistance during the last decade, for example, contained large construction components as well as teacher training and book production components. Even if these compromises result in a slower pace of progress than some commentators might prefer, they are hopeful signs that the ability of primary schools to help students master literacy or other skills and subjects will gradually improve.

Still, we must mention that there is one significant fault in reasoning about quality that deserves much more attention. This is the failure to recognize and to make use of the functional connection between primary and secondary instruction. In part, this deficiency results from the desire of many individuals and donor agencies to use primary schools as a means to provide what they believe is indispensable knowledge to the majority of the population. These schools should focus more on "terminal" instruction and less on serving only as the first step on the road to higher levels. Unfortunately, this compulsion has caused many people to forget that primary schools have not yet demonstrated the worth of the indispensable knowledge. As we noted in our reference to the certificates of teachers, above, parents and students still see secondary education as the main goal of primary education.

Or, to look at this in historical terms, the advocates of quality think in terms of the "common" school approach of the United States - a system that is driven from the "bottom". They forget that they work within the Napoleonic system of France - a system that is driven from the "top".

Accordingly, there has been little effort to use secondary education as the central method for altering the quality of primary instruction. It is difficult, for example, to promote other methods of learning if they are inconsistent with the need to pass national examinations. Success in these examinations demands a strong capacity to memorize. Similarly, because teachers are the products of secondary schools and are masters of the art of memorization, it is hard to convince them of the merits of anything that they themselves have not experienced.

The failure to link primary and secondary education also results from an inconvenient division of labor. While the World Bank, UNESCO, USAID and other agencies have focussed on the primary level, the French government has dominated secondary education in the Francophone countries since the reform of 1946. It could not be otherwise because the certificates issued by this level of education have had to be valid in France. Secondary education in the Sahel has changed at almost the same pace as in France since 1946. These still fall short of what is necessary to encourage widespread demand for the kinds of changes that advocates seek at the primary level.

Although we have no details, we understand that the French government is considering important changes to the way that it deals with education in the Sahel. This is a positive sign. More positive would be initiation of major efforts by all donors and governments to work together to discover means by which secondary education (still tied to France, if necessary) can serve as a catalyst for improving the quality of primary schools. Even more positive would be efforts by all interested parties to bring greater coherence to discussions of financial issues.

VIII. FINANCE

The debates about finance concentrate on five issues: (a) the share of the total government budget that should be allocated to education; (b) the share of the education budget that should be allocated to each level of the system; (c) the amount of expenditure per student at each level; (d) the share of this expenditure that should be given to each type of input (e.g. teachers, training, books, construction, etc.); and (e) the shares of the total social costs of education that should be supported by government (including resources supplied to them by donors), by local communities (including resources supplied by non-government organizations), and by parents and students.

Opinions on each of the first four issues are usually extensions of views on other matters. Those who believe that enrollment is too low, for example, also may say that education's share of the total government budget should rise. If they think that basic or primary education has higher priority than secondary education, they may call for a shift in resources to the primary level from higher levels. If they are concerned about poor quality at a particular level, they suggest an increase in expenditure per student at that level. If cost-effectiveness seems inadequate, it follows that there should be efforts to reduce the cost per unit of result (e.g. reduce teacher salaries or increase the number of students per teacher) or to transfer resources from expenditures that have less impact upon learning outcomes to those that have greater impact. People with opposite opinions, or who give priority to other purposes of education, or who feel that they will lose advantages, dispute the suggestions.

Many individuals try to strengthen their claims about finance with economic arguments. These arguments rely upon the concept of a causal relation between education, productivity and economic growth. Recommendations for larger allocations to education or to primary schools are accompanied by the argument that such actions will result in more efficient use of economic resources. Social returns to investment in education or in primary education, they say, are higher than returns to investment in other sectors or other levels of education. Future research may again support such claims. As we noted, this approach to

explanation does not have a reliable foundation. For the moment, all suggestions regarding finance flow from personal conviction or from other institutional imperatives.

Even if one supposed that research could support the suggestions, they would still be wrong because they confuse government resources with total resources. Social returns flow from total investment in education, not just from government investment. We have encountered no household surveys for the countries of the Sahel that provide adequate information about how much families spend on education. Surveys in other countries, as well as our informal inquiries in Mali and Tchad, show that these expenditures can be very significant. Total family expenditures for the items that observers usually consider, such as repair of buildings, furniture, books, and school fees, are often much less than for items that they do not consider.

Our interviews in Bamako suggest that where they are obligatory, the total annual expenditure for school uniforms in a class of 40 students is approximately equal to the annual salary of the teacher. Other important items include: shoes; public transportation; private boarding or mid-day meals; extra food for children that must walk long distances each day; examination fees; fees for special events; and the work that students (and sometimes parents) do in school gardens and workshops. If household expenditures are greater than government expenditures, as we think they often are, these data need to be produced and then entered into discussions about finance. Without them, large parts of the discussions remain unintelligible.

This brings us to the fifth issue. There is a feeling among certain individuals and donor agencies that parents and students, for various reasons, should contribute more and support a larger share of the total cost of education. They talk about "user fees". If they believe that primary education should have priority over secondary and higher education, they suggest a reduction or elimination of scholarships and boarding facilities as a way of releasing resources for use at the primary level. Extending the logic to its limit, some individuals and agencies also talk about "privatization" of both primary and secondary schools. This usually means that the governments should promote creation of non-government schools that operate on a profit or non-profit basis.

The difficulty here is that the lack of data on how much families already spend for education makes it hard to assess the merits of suggestions about user fees or about privatization. If spending is large relative to income, and if the perceived benefits of education are marginal, the fees might cause a drop in enrollment. If both the expenditures and the perceived benefits are high, the addition of fees might cause a strong protest. Regarding privatization, collection of appropriate data might show that schools in many areas are already almost completely

privatized. Also, one may assume that if benefits are sufficiently high relative to costs, individuals and communities can usually create schools without persuasion from the government. We will return to this topic in a moment.

A similar difficulty stems from the lack of data on how much scholarships and boarding facilities represent in family income. These may be important transfer payments. Parents and students may perceive them as the first tangible returns that they obtain from their investment in primary education. If the transfers are significant, the likelihood of a decline in secondary enrollment is much lower than the chance of a protest – not only by families with students already in secondary school but also by those with students in primary school that aspire to the more advanced levels and the payments that they offer.

An example of what can happen took place in Mali recently. The government announced the elimination of scholarships and boarding facilities in exchange for a \$12 million grant from a consortium of donor agencies. In sequence, this announcement led to: a widespread protest; the collapse of the government; reinstatement of the payments by the new government; and a period of crisis in some agencies (i.e. the World Bank and USAID) regarding whether they should abandon or continue with their education efforts.

As in the industrial nations, issues of finance are central issues of politics. If individuals and institutions do not like the characteristics of finance that display themselves at a particular moment, they also do not like the equilibrium between competing ideas and interests at that moment. Many advocates for change in the donor agencies recognize that they are political actors. They realize that there is a time and a place for every proposal. They acknowledge that they must seize any opening that seems to offer a chance for acceptance of their suggestions.

The most significant opening that has presented itself in recent years is the progressive decline in the capacity of most governments to finance education. Donor agencies, the World Bank especially, have recognized it and for a decade have used it to pressure governments to make many of the changes to which we alluded above. Unfortunately, this effort has been hampered by incomplete technical analysis and faulty reasoning and, as in the example of Mali, by dramatic demonstrations of error.

A more important hindrance has been the failure of many advocates to see the opening as an opportunity to try to alter the political equilibrium. Only a very few of them have understood that the pressures for change that really matter are those that flow from the growth in demand for schools, and from engagement in the processes of democratization that usually accompany this growth when governments have very limited resources.

IX. DEMOCRATIZATION

Through their support of the governments, the donor agencies reinforced the education systems that have been in place since independence. In the process, they also fortified the idea that governments have a "natural" responsibility to finance national education systems. This idea contradicts both logic and history. Governments do what they are instructed to do by their constituencies. If resources are inadequate, they either negotiate with the constituencies to arrive at acceptable compromises, or they fall. What matters over time is the rate at which changes in the size and composition of the constituencies produce changes in the demands that they make upon the governments.

If they do not continue to receive increased support from donor agencies, the governments will not be able to respond to increases in demand for education in the same manner as in the past. Even with this support, the governments are already being provoked into renegotiations of the social contract, i.e. between themselves and their societies, that the Sahelian countries inherited at independence. In education, a sign of this is their response to the emergence of what others give various names such as "private", mentioned above, but that we prefer to call "community" schools. These are facilities that are financed by sources other than the government.

The coming of this phenomenon is important because it returns the Sahelian societies to the same situation that France, Japan, the United States and other countries faced until the second half of the 19th century. Where there was demand for primary, secondary, religious or any other kind of school, individual communities and neighborhoods organized themselves to produce one with whatever means they found. In response to growth and change in their political constituencies, governments became important actors in the process only during the last one hundred years.

It should be noted that the community school is not new to the region. The idea was implicit in the efforts of people in Benin to support missionary teachers in the early part of this century. It remains implicit in the (old) basic education and Islamic systems. It is implicit in the exertions of the parent associations in Tchad. It is implicit in the struggles of forty urban and twenty rural groups of parents that we heard about in Mali who were searching for resources with which to establish schools for their children during 1991. What is new is that the phenomenon is spreading beyond Tchad and is becoming more visible throughout the Sahel because demand for schools is almost everywhere overtaking the capacity of the governments to finance them.

This is only one aspect of the story. Another aspect is the influence that these parents and communities are beginning to exert on the behaviors of some

governments and donor agencies. The efforts of the parent groups in Mali has already led the education ministry, which lacks capacity to pay additional teachers, to begin to shift from the role of paymaster and supplier of teachers to the role of intermediary between teachers and communities. By arranging the terms of contracts between communities and prospective teachers, and by helping communities to calculate how one or another combination of cash, food and housing could attract a teacher, some ministry staff now serve more as negotiators than as administrators.

Other staff have begun to act as intermediaries between communities and outside sources of funding, such as non-governmental and donor agencies. In the case of the twenty rural groups, the idea that it was possible to create a school without government assistance, the effort of parents to secure non-government funds, and the request for identification of qualified teachers, all originated from the dynamism of one school inspector. With initiatives of the urban groups, these actions have stimulated consideration by several non-governmental organizations regarding whether they should enter the education sector by helping the parents. They have also caused USAID, in one of the few large education projects that it has in the Sahel, to reorient several parts of the Mali project in the direction of these and other similar parents.

These things are not dramatic. They are only early signs. But they represent an important departure from prior practices and relations among donor agencies, governments and citizens. If the new practices expand, one may imagine that important areas of decision making that now rest exclusively with the government, such as the employment, promotion and retention of teachers, or the distribution of resources across different education inputs in each school, will gradually decentralize. At a certain point the process of negotiated decentralization will stop and the state and the communities will arrive at a new social contract regarding roles and responsibilities for education. To the extent that this process, among other possibilities, yields salary structures for teachers that increasingly reflect the laws of supply and demand, it may even please the people in donor agencies who are absorbed by the details of finance.

These signs are promising because several of us have seen them before and have followed their evolution in other countries with Francophone education systems. Over the course of a few decades, for example, these small beginnings in Haiti led to a situation in which more than 80 percent of primary students and almost all secondary students are now in non-government schools. More interesting, after a long period of disinterest by the government and donor agencies, there was a change in relationships between these institutions, and between the institutions and the rest of the population.

After some misgivings, USAID shifted its support from government to non-government education in 1985. With help from USAID, the major non-governmental organizations that supported many schools established a federation to attempt to integrate the schools into a national system in 1986. A few years later, after providing the government with the same kinds of projects as in the Sahel since 1976, even the World Bank joined the process. It began to insist that it would not agree to new loans unless the government approved major components for the non-government sector.

In a discussion with one of us in 1991, the Haitian Minister of Education mentioned that he and his predecessors were ministers only of government education. The ministry of "national" education existed only when staff of the ministry sat with staff of the non-government federation. Fortunately, this national ministry came to life frequently. Federation personnel often came to the ministry with requests of one kind or another. The ministry staff often visited the federation because they needed to negotiate mutually satisfactory arrangements in several important areas.

Before the start of 1991 the main area was finance. Afterward it expanded to include curriculum and teacher training because the government dissolved its Institut Pedagogique National (IPN). Decades of assistance to the IPN from UNESCO, the UNDP, the World Bank and other agencies produced nothing of lasting value. The non-government schools had developed superior curricula and training methods. The government therefore decided to rely on the knowledge, skills and services of the non-governmental organizations instead of its own capabilities. The flow of events in Haiti is one example of a direction that renegotiations of a social contract can produce.

In Africa, another example of direction is what seems to have happened in Zambia in recent years. Hoppers (1989) reports that the financial constraints of the government, as in the Sahel, mobilized parents, administrators and teachers to build schools and to contribute toward their maintenance. More important was the individual initiative of teachers, inspectors, administrators and parents to carry out ideas for reform that the government didn't implement after announcing them in 1977.

For instance, the teachers' need to find additional resources for their schools (not to be confused with resources for themselves), encouraged many to become more interested and more productive in generating revenues from school gardens and from home economics, woodwork and metalwork courses. Parents and students became actively involved in this process. They did this because the income produced by the work, though small, helped to purchase additional pedagogical materials. They did not necessarily see that the courses were useful, or even that they were part of the formal curriculum. If the school was to do a good job

teaching the other courses, students and parents needed to do whatever they could to sustain the school.

Though they have no official authority to do this, teachers organize themselves to conduct what they call "resource work". Teachers from different localities collaborate to improve the quality of education by jointly producing new curricula and pedagogical materials, and by organizing their own school inspection service. Scandinavian donors have been helping them. Hoppers adds that through these things the teachers have not only acquired more confidence in their profession but also have taken upon themselves the responsibility for leadership in education.

Hoppers provides no numbers with which to estimate the extent of this phenomenon. It is possible that what he reports is more an exception than a rule in Zambia. He also fails to mention problems. With perfection rare, one may assume that there have been some. No matter how over-enthusiastic the account might be, it is consistent: with the idea that necessity is often the mother of very useful inventions; with our notes about Tchad, Mali and Haiti; and with the efforts of parents, teachers and community leaders in France and in the United States to supply education long before higher levels of government developed the interest and the resources to help them.

We do not know the exact forms that these processes may exhibit in the Sahel in the future. The thing that matters, as Lourie (1987) notes, is that the combination of government resource constraints, the rising scale and influence of foreign and national non-governmental organizations and of local governance structures, the increasing involvement of parents in finance and support of schools, and of teachers and administrators in designing the content of education, almost always leads to introduction and adoption of very useful and important ideas and actions. These ideas and actions may eventually lead to school systems that are more consistent with the heterogeneous composition of cultures, resources, responsibilities and interests in education that distribute themselves across the social landscape of the Sahel. As expressed by a process of constant renegotiation of the social contract, they also may lead toward more democratic practice inside and outside education.

We must stress, however, that the fundamental constraint on the speed by which these processes can evolve in the region remains the low level of demand for schools in rural areas. The dual processes of decentralization and democratization in education cannot move forward quickly without substantial increases in the demand because it is the driving force behind these processes. It follows that efforts are needed to speed both the rate of growth of income in rural areas and the rate of eradication of obsolete, irrelevant and counterproductive ideas that hinder possibilities for development of school systems that build on indigenous instead of imported concepts of education. Or, to use the stronger language that

we introduced earlier, one of the most formidable barriers to progress in the Sahel is the cultural backwardness and analytical weakness of too many individuals in government and in donor agencies. Among other consequences of major and minor significance, this completely disables their capacity to understand the difference between talk about democracy and the actual practice of it.

X. CONCLUSION

At the 1990 expert reflexion of the Club du Sahel that stimulated the request for this study, Jacques Giri described the school systems of the Sahel as a poor graft (*mauvaise greffe*) of European systems upon societies that, by their nature, seem to need other kinds of systems. To the extent that almost all school systems in the world are not well adapted to the probable future needs of their societies, Giri is correct. But the future is not the present, and in the present the schools and other forms of education do no more than reflect the social, economic, and political conditions in which they function. It follows that if schools and other forms of education are to become more attuned to the future than to the present, so must the underlying factors that produce the conditions.

In this study we concentrated our attention on only one of these factors: the ideas and operations of mostly non-African individuals and agencies that are an important element of a social category that we have labelled the political class. These people -- we emphasize for the record that we include ourselves among them -- are the inheritors of a long tradition of incursion by the industrial societies into the affairs of Africa. These incursions were initially propelled by the search for glory, empire, trade, and diffusion of the civilizing influences of European culture and Christianity. In the second half of this century the drive transformed itself into a search for diffusion of the benefits of "development". On the eve of the 21st century the search has expanded slightly to include diffusion of the benefits of "democracy".

While tracing the evolution of this incursion in matters of education from 1816 to the present, we noted that there was only one instance when (at least some) people in the Sahel were able not only to demand the importation of a particular type of education system -- the French metropolitan system with its focus on secondary certificates -- but also to receive it. That was in 1946. There was demand for importation of other forms of education as well, the Islamic systems being only one obvious example, but this did not suit the purposes or interests of the representatives of the industrial nations or of other members of the political class either before or after independence. At best, these other systems were tolerated. What the people in the Sahel needed, according to the agents of the industrial nations, could never be what they wanted.

Before independence, the colonial administrators, missionaries and others, such as the members of the French parliament, said that what the region needed was "practical" or "adapted" education for which Africans inside and outside the political class rarely showed enthusiasm. After independence, new administrators, missionaries and politicians called this necessary education "basic", or used other titles to suggest knowledge and skills that in their view were simultaneously relevant, appropriate and indispensable. No matter the title, the education that they talked about was almost the same kind of education that the governments of industrial nations and their constituencies called "popular" or "primary", and that they promoted among their populations in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The reasoning behind this talk in Africa and elsewhere held that questions about what was or was not basic, relevant, appropriate and indispensable, or why it was or was not any of these things, could only be answered by self-proclaimed authorities on the subject. By definition, people that did not have the particular types of knowledge or skill that the authorities believed were important could not answer these questions for themselves. It followed that all forms of learning and understanding other than what the authorities proposed were neither basic nor education. This was as true among authorities who believed that items such as literacy were intrinsically good as it was among authorities who viewed literacy as a means to reach other objectives such as nation-building, maintenance of social order, loyalty to the state apparatus, social justice, or increases in productivity and economic growth.

One difficulty that arises with this reasoning is analytical deficiency. It undermines claims to authority that base themselves on "expertise". With respect to the notion that education enhances productivity, for example, our review of the evidence suggests that the idea does not have a firm empirical foundation, and that it has managed to sustain itself largely because of defective technical analysis. Deficiencies in the quality of economic and political understanding are equally evident with respect to many ideas about the demand for schools, methods to improve the quality of what takes place in schools, and financial matters. More often than not, the ideas flow from pure personal beliefs or institutional imperatives. They are neither better or worse than the ideas that other people might propose, especially people outside the political class.

In this regard, the second difficulty is the lack of political forms through which other ideas concerning the purposes and characteristics of schools and other methods of education can insert themselves into the consciousness and the debates of the political class. In part, this difficulty emerges from European attitudes and ideas of the 18th and 19th centuries that, at least in application to developing countries, have managed to survive in good health until now. This cultural backwardness -- backward because it has gradually been superseded in the 20th century by attitudes and ideas that reflect democratic rather than elitist principles

of social practice -- prevents members of the political class from hearing what people outside it have to say or from thinking that it might be instructive to ask for their opinions. More important, in large measure the backwardness is itself the result of a weak level of demand by rural populations for schools and other services from the central governments.

This weak demand, which stems from many factors including the low level of income and economic development in the region, has the effect of slowing the rate at which rural populations become members of the political class and constituents of government. That is, unlike several democratic industrial nations where every parent demands, receives, and exercises the right to be an expert on education, where decisions about education are widely understood to be purely political and never technical matters, and where authorities have little choice but to hear and to seem responsive to them, in the Sahel there is only very limited pressure on the authorities and their backwardness. That is, the political class does not hear what other people have to say because it does not need to hear them to survive. In our view, and in the view of many others that we spoke with in Africa, France and the United States, this a fundamental constraint on progress in education (and in most other areas of importance).

Elimination of this constraint will take a long time. Even France, according to reports of a statement made by the Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China a few years ago, is still a century or more away from achieving the goals of its Revolution. History offers few insights about methods to accelerate the general process of democratization. It does show that missionary work, or what we sometimes refer to as the "nagging" forces of change, has often had a beneficial influence. We therefore think that a new kind of missionary work, one that counteracts the backwardness of current styles of work with an approach that organizes itself around blind faith in democratic practice, may be in order. Articles of this faith, as well some steps to preach it, are:

One: Suppress the temptation to presume that literacy rates, levels of school attainment, enrollment rates or other measures of the quality and quantity of human resources have the same significance in all parts of the Sahel as they do in the industrial nations. Every social, economic and political environment makes its own special demands on what people need to know and learn. Understand these rates and levels only as indicators of the nature of these environments and of the great changes that may need to occur in them in order for the rates and levels to change more quickly.

Two: Stifle the idea that increases in the rates and levels can by themselves cause increases in productivity and economic growth. This can happen sometimes, but the conditions under which it occurs are very rare. Focus attention on increasing the rate of emergence and of diffusion of these conditions by other means.

Three: Control the habit of assuming that government schools and education are the same thing. These schools offer many services that may have nothing to do with learning things that can improve the material circumstances of people. Government primary schools in most societies offer only one skill which may or may not be of use: literacy. Almost everything else they do serves the interests of the political constituencies that drive the behaviors of the governments. These schools, if they are operated by central governments, are oriented mainly to the solvency of the state and only secondarily to the betterment of individuals.

Four: Use the flow of history to reach literacy or other learning goals. Do not insist only upon trying to swim against the stream. If it is true that the demand for primary schools derives mainly from a desire for secondary and higher certificates, then efforts to improve the quality of learning in primary schools may become more effective if they focus on the "target" that parents and students already have than on confusing them with changes at the primary level that often seem to detract from reaching the target.

In this regard there is a need for collaborative efforts between the French government, which more or less controls secondary education in the Francophone countries because of the link with the metropolitan system, the other donor agencies that focus on primary schools, and the governments of the Sahel. This effort is needed to see if there are ways to alter national examinations and the curricula of general secondary schools that can maintain the recognition of certificates in France and serve as an incentive for change in teaching methods and curricula at the primary level.

Five: Similarly, focus on activities that seem to offer good prospects for both improving learning outcomes in government schools and meeting little resistance from parents, students, teachers and administrators, such as in-service teacher training, procurement of books, and separate schools or classes for girls. Suspend activities that are grounded on deficient technical and political reasoning, such as most financial issues.

Six: Act to accelerate the flow of history. On the supply side, do not reinforce the capacities of central governments to continue to respond to growth in the demand for schools in the same manner as they have done since independence. Use the opportunity presented by the confluence of fiscal constraints and increases in demand to cultivate the emergence of community schools. Expansion in the number of these schools offers promise for increasing the level of social pressure that can lead to: renegotiations of the social contract between governments and civil society that they inherited from the colonial era; promotion of decentralization; and democratization of the processes by which education systems evolve.

Seven: On the demand side, bring the culture of the political class up to date. Cease and desist from telling people what they should know. Talk less. Listen more. Cultivate opportunities for religious leaders, parents and other community representatives, especially those from areas that show low levels of demand for government schools, to express opinions and to argue among themselves and with interested members of the political class about: their definitions of basic education; their ideas about how to improve it; their judgements about the most appropriate methods to transmit it; their approaches to implementing and financing it; their senses of whether these approaches include roles for government and donor agencies; and, if so, their conceptions of how these and other institutions of the political class can best participate in the life of their communities.

Eight: Use the Segou round-table of 1989 as the model for beginning to provide such opportunities. At Segou, the Club du Sahel, CILSS, and USAID conspired to organize a regional meeting (on natural resources management) that included almost as many farmers and representatives of village associations as the usual assortment of government and agency personnel. This was a major departure from habitual practice. Demand that all future large and small meetings about education include representation from the full spectrum of people who have interests in the matter. Do this for all important conferences no matter how confused or frustrating the experiences might seem because in the interests of promoting democracy, which by its nature is usually very disorganized, this kind of approach must become as habitual as the previous one.

There have been more than enough conferences of the kinds that took place in France in 1833, and in Senegal, Niger and Thailand more recently. The Sahel does not require more affirmations of faith in 18th and 19th century ideas. This faith is the poor graft of Europe upon the region. The region requires grafting of late 20th century ideas to help it move into the 21st century. Permanent exercise of democratic practice, a manifest declaration of faith in these ideas, is a vital method of speeding the process.

For those who insist that education is a technical matter and that what is needed is better analysis that can prove effective in efforts to "reform" education, we add a final comment. Judgements about what are good or bad are in the eye of the beholder. Our judgements about the work of others are our opinions, nothing more, nothing less. In the democratic regions of the industrial nations, all ideas and all judgements about them filter through broad, participatory processes of permanent review and debate. In the end, it is the society, and not just government officials and self-proclaimed experts, that decides what is good or bad. Because this process is absent in the Sahel, the merit of an idea can only be established by the degree of social resistance that arises in response to it during implementation. This is not an especially cost-effective way to assess the soundness of proposals for change.

Thus even if one does not attach importance to democracy as a matter of principle, the practice of it is essential for improving both the quality of analysis and the characteristics of education. That is, what needs attention is not so much the quality of analysis as the quality of the social process by which analysis is judged. The central issue is not about reform of education. It is about reform of the process of reform.

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